

# Branded exhibitions as co-creation spaces

Narrative analysis on consumer experiences in Louis Vuitton exhibitions

Master's Thesis  
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**Abstract**

Consumers are constantly seeking for new experiences that will bring value in their lives. Similarly, brands pursue their own goals by offering such experiences and this way aim at engaging consumers. One example of brand-related experiences is branded exhibitions that act as engagement platforms where firms and consumers bring in their own resources to co-create value. Within this context, the interest of this research is on examining how consumers interpret firm-provided symbolic resources by employing their own operand and operant resources to co-create value. Also, how value is perceived by the consumers in branded exhibitions is discussed. This is done by interpreting consumers' narratives of their experiences in two different Louis Vuitton exhibitions.

In order to illuminate consumer experiences in branded exhibitions, I gathered data utilizing semi-structured interviews in two Louis Vuitton exhibitions – SERIES3 in London and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez in Paris. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed by using analysis of narratives -method which involves finding different themes derived from the consumer narratives. At the same time, the theoretical framework of the research started to emerge. Interpreting the data through the lens of consumers' identity projects and resource-based theory of the consumer resulted in four different activities of co-creation in which consumers use their physical, cultural and social operant resources to create value to their incomplete life projects and roles.

The findings indicate that in the branded exhibitions of Louis Vuitton consumers co-create value by consuming cultural contexts, social relationships, sense of freedom and utopian worlds. Firstly, the exhibitions generated cultural value when consumers encountered cultural contexts that are rich in symbolic resources to be used in their personal life projects and roles. Also social value was created when consumers interacted with different subcultures on different levels of intensity. By consuming freedom and utopia, consumers added utopian value to their life projects and roles in order to find their "true" selves and on the other hand, to realize their culturally constructed dream selves. As a conclusion, branded exhibitions offer a space for value co-creation where consumers can develop their life projects and roles through consumption and thus create cultural, social and utopian value to their lives.

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**Keywords** consumer experience, exhibition, operant resources, symbolic resources, consumer life projects, value co-creation

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### Tiivistelmä

Tuotteiden ja palvelujen sijaan nykypäivän kuluttajat etsivät elämyksiä, joita kuluttamalla he voivat luoda arvoa omaan elämäänsä. Yhtä lailla brändit tavoittelevat omia tavoitteitaan tarjoamalla kuluttajille elämyksiä, jotka saavat heidät ylläpitämään suhdettaan brändiin. Yksi keino tarjota tällaisia elämyksiä ovat brändinäyttelyt, joissa sekä yritykset että kuluttajat kohtaavat hyödyntääkseen omia resurssejaan arvonaluonnissa. Tästä syystä ne ovat ideallinen tutkimusympäristö tutkia sitä, miten kuluttajat hyödyntävät heidän operandit (aineellisia) sekä operantteja (aineettomia) resurssejaan tulkitakseen yritysten tarjoamia symbolisia resursseja. Tämä tutkimus valaisee myös sitä, minkälaista arvoa kuluttajat luovat yhdessä brändien kanssa kuluttamalla brändinäyttelyitä. Näihin tutkimuskysymyksiin pyritään saaman vastaus tulkitsemalla kuluttajien kokemuksia kahdessa Louis Vuittonin näyttelyssä.

Kuluttajien kokemukset kerättiin haastattelujen avulla, joiden kulkua ohjasi ennalta päätetty kysymysrunko. Kaikki haastattelut tehtiin kahdessa Louis Vuittonin brändinäyttelyssä: SERIES3 -näyttelyssä Lontoossa sekä Volez, Voguez, Voyagez -näyttelyssä Pariisissa. Haastattelut litteroitiin ja kuluttajien narratiivista pyrittiin tunnistamaan erilaisia teemakokonaisuuksia narratiivisen analyysin avulla. Löydetyt teemat ohjasivat myös teoriapohjan muodostamista. Näin ollen aineistoa tulkittiin kuluttajien identiteettiprojektien muodostamisen sekä kuluttajan resurssi-perusteisen teorian kautta.

Kaikkiaan neljä eri keinoa, jolla kuluttajat luovat arvoa brändinäyttelyissä nousi esiin kuluttajien narratiiveista. Kuluttajat luovat kulttuurista arvoa kuluttamalla kulttuurisesti muodostuneita konteksteja, jotka sisältävät runsaasti symbolisia resursseja. Kuluttajat sisällyttävät näitä symbolisia resursseja heidän identiteettiprojekteihin ja rooleihin. Toiseksi, kuluttajat samaistuvat eri alakulttuureihin luomalla ja vahvistamalla erilaisia sosiaalisia suhteita brändinäyttelyiden kautta. Tämä tuottaa sosiaalista arvoa. Lisäksi, kuluttajat luovat utooppista arvoa kuluttamalla symbolista vapautta sekä utopistisia elementtejä, joka auttaa yksilöä löytämään sisäisen, ”aidon” itsensä. Utooppinen arvo edistää myös luomaan identiteettiprojekteja, jotka edustavat kulttuurisesti hyväksyttyjä unelmia itsestä.

Näin ollen brändinäyttelyt tarjoavat kuluttajille elämyksiä, joita kuluttamalla he voivat luoda kulttuurista, sosiaalista sekä utooppista arvoa yhdessä brändin kanssa rakentaakseen moninaisia identiteettiprojektejaan ja roolejaan.

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**Avainsanat** kuluttajakokemus, näyttely, operantit resurssit, symboliset resurssit, kuluttajien identiteettiprojektit, arvonaluonti

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# 1. Introduction

*“Nicolas Ghesquière has the one quality that separates a truly great fashion designer from all the thousands of others who work in the industry. It is this: The great ones can reach into our minds and tell us what we want. They’re the ones who will ease our worries and clarify our confusions and raise our spirits. They’re the psychotherapists, the sociologists of fashion who can make our blood fizz with the sensation of how enjoyable it is to be female, and alive now.”*

- Quote on Vogue.com on Louis Vuitton Fall 2015 RTW

In the experience-based economy of today, brands seek for fundamental connectivity and loyalty between the brand and the customer. Similarly, consumers seek for extraordinary experiences instead of consuming only products and services (Carù and Cova, 2006; Celsi et al., 1993). Together with the takeover of the service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and the experience economy (see Pine and Gilmore, 1998), branded experiences have become a valuable asset for firms to create such connections and managing all the ‘touch-points’ of the consumer experience is part of the successful brand management (Verhoef et al., 2009). In order to result in high customer engagement, the brand experience requires consumer involvement at different levels including rational, emotional and physical components (Gentile et al., 2007). Therefore, consumer experience is multidimensional structure formed not only by the firm actions but also of the consumer resources and the socio-cultural environment (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982).

One of the growing ways of experiential marketing are emplaced brandscapes – stores, branded trade shows, events and exhibitions that act as ‘engagement platforms’ of organizations where the interaction between the consumer and the brand creates the experience (Ramaswamy, 2011). What makes emplaced brandscapes particularly special way of creating branded experiences is that in addition to the educational aspect of them, the multisensory stimuli, emotional intensity and fantasy aspects evoke pleasure and enjoyment in consumers (Falk et al., 1998; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Inevitably, firms do no longer control their spaces but the value comes from the way consumers perceive the experience in them. Therefore, the reasons why consumers engage to different types of

events and exhibitions can be found in consumers' behavior and socio-cultural aspects of consumption (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Brown et al., 2003; Holt, 2002; Peñaloza, 2001).

Following this thought, Crowther and Donlan (2011) present branded events to exist as value creation spaces instead of only as tools for marketing communication. In other words, firms and consumers involve their operand and operant resources in the interaction that creates the experience (Arnould et al., 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The emphasis is on consumers' operant resources, that cover consumers' physical senses and emotions, schemas, cultural knowledge and social relationships that are central influencer to consumers' world view, consumption actions and identity construction (see Arnould et al., 2006; Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holt, 1995; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). By deploying these resources in the emplaced brandscapes, consumers create new experiences that are different from their everyday life and valuable for the construction of their life projects and roles.

Therefore, exhibitions as emplaced brandscapes are ideal settings to explore consumer experiences and the co-creation of value in the marketplace. This research is based on two branded exhibitions of Louis Vuitton: SERIES3 held in London in the fall 2015 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez that was displayed in Paris in the spring 2016. This research takes a socio-cultural approach to consumer experiences, using research on consumers' identity construction and resource-based theory of the consumer (Arnould et al., 2006) as a framework for the analysis. The findings indicate that in the branded exhibitions consumers create cultural, social and utopian value that is incorporated into the relevant life projects and roles. Thus, consumers are in a constant hunt for value which directs their consumption behavior in the marketplace.

## 1.1 Research gap

Consumer experiences have been an interest for marketing research since it became a revolutionary approach to engaging customers (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Especially extensive work has been done on consumer experiences from the consumer culture approach, focusing on how consumers consume and create marketplace cultures (e.g. Brown et al., 2003; Peñaloza, 2001, 1994) and on how consumers interpret the

firm-provided messages (Brown et al., 2003; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). However, in the words of Tumbat and Belk (2011), majority of the research on consumer experience emphasizes the role of the experience provider instead of the active role of the consumer in co-creating the experience. In contradiction with the previous research, they also imply that experiences are not purely for constructing social identities but that they might also contribute to the more individualistic interpersonal goals and ideals. This perspective to experiences is also in the interest of this research.

This research contributes also to the research stream of value co-creation theories, that is a vestige of service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) that has been applied to consumer culture studies (Arnould, 2007). Arnould et al. (2006) highlight, that relatively little is known about the role of different consumer-based resources in the co-creation of value. The importance of consumers' operant resources has been widely acknowledged (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) but identifying all types of operant resources that consumers activate in the brand-consumer interaction still needs clarification (Arnould, 2005; Arnould et al., 2006). Therefore, this research follows the suggestion of Arnould et al. (2006) and examines the interplay between life projects, narratives and consumers' operant and operand resources in order to answer what is the value for consumers' life project construction in the co-creation spaces like Louis Vuitton exhibitions.

As Louis Vuitton exhibitions are between museums, exhibitions, showrooms and art galleries plus, they also share characteristics with theme parks (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), they represent a unique form of emplaced brandscapes that makes it an ideal context to study (Sherry, 1998). In addition, in such extraordinary environment consumers can describe their experiences better and recognize the key moments creating value compared to the everyday situations that are often routine-like and sedate (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Making this research on the value creation in the brandscape of a luxury brand gives new insight into the hedonic consumption of experiences and current trends in the luxury industry. Value co-creation is particularly important for luxury brands and that's why they offer consumers many opportunities to interact with the brand and other consumers in emplaced brandscapes (Choi et al., 2016). Therefore, branded exhibitions make an ideal research context to investigate how consumers participate in the value creation by employing their own resources.



## 1.2 Research questions

As framed in the previous section, this research focuses on the co-creation of value in the exhibition context. Hence, this research aims at analyzing what is the role of consumers resources in the process of value creation. It is also important to understand how the value is perceived by the consumers as they construct their life projects and roles. Therefore, based on the framework of identity construction, consumers' operand and operant resources and value co-creation, this research aims at understanding:

*“How consumers co-create value in branded exhibitions?”*

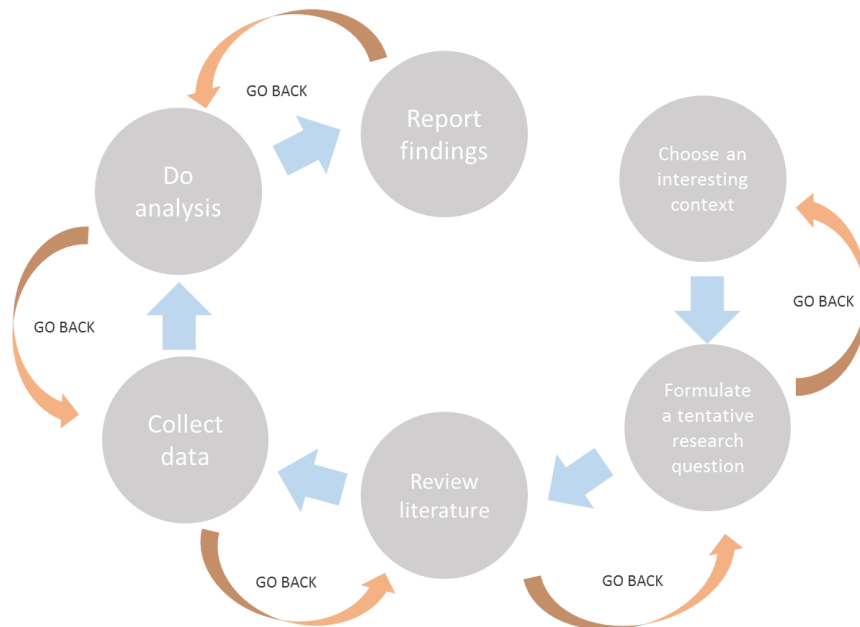
with additional research questions:

*“How consumers' employ their operand and operant resources to co-create value?”* (Vargo and Lusch, 2004)

and *“How do consumers perceive value?”*

By answering these research questions this research contributes to knowledge in consumer experiences, consumers use of operand and operant resources in the marketplace interactions and in co-creation of value. This research also illuminates *what is value* for customers and how it is used to construct their life projects and roles. Due to the context, this research also aims at giving insight into the luxury industry and the hedonic consumption of luxury brandscapes.

### 1.3 Research process



*Figure 1: The research process*

The research process of this thesis was iterative and the final result was an outcome of many repeating phases, as the figure 1 illustrates. The process started with searching and choosing a suitable research context and formulating first versions of research questions. Also some literature review was done and initial theoretical background was illustrated. There were two separate data gathering, one in October in London and the following in February in Paris. After the first data collection was done and transcribed, the themes emerging from this data set was evaluated and compared to the theories found relevant before. The same was done after the second data gathering and after, the final theoretical frame was established. Due to these changes, the process had to be agile and flexible to even big changes.

The research material was gathered through interviews and ethnography. There were 42 interviews all together that were transcribed and analyzed over and over again. The interview materials were gone through multiple times and several different units of interesting themes were sorted and their relations assessed. This was done by the inductive analysis of

narratives. The ethnographic part of the data collection was in a form of photographs, videos and audio that was also used as a supporting data. Also my personal, written description on the exhibition was considered in the data analysis. However, the emphasis was on the interviews and the report is based on the findings interpreted from this data.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

This report includes a theoretical review on the identity construction of a postmodern consumer, the resource-based theory of the consumer and the findings and discussion of the value co-creation activities that emerged in the exhibitions of Louis Vuitton. The report starts with chapter 2 that gives a closer look to the consumers' construction of their identity projects through consumption of symbolic resources. The chapter 3 rounds out the previous chapter by introducing the resource-based theory of the consumer (Arnould et al., 2006). The emphasis of this chapter is on consumers' operand and operant resources and describing the value co-creation process. These two chapters form the framework for this research, that is summarized in the chapter 4.

In the following chapter 5 I will introduce the methodology used in this research. First, I will illuminate the interpretive approach to this research as well as the interview method and narrative analysis. To fully understand the context of this research, an introduction to Louis Vuitton and the two exhibitions is given. This gives a foundation for the chapter 6 that presents the findings of this research – the consumption activities of value co-creation. After that, these findings are further discussed in the chapter 7. Finally, I will make conclusions of the research, give some managerial implications, highlight the limitations of this study and give suggestions for further research.

## 2. Consumer identity projects

In marketing research, much emphasis has been put on how consumers interpret, rework and transform symbolic meanings and consumer ideologies in the marketplace and how marketplace resources are employed to complement consumers' identity projects (e.g. Holt, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Thompson, 2004; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Identity formation is seen as a narrative process in which postmodern consumers seek for clarifying self-concept and interaction by consuming symbolic resources (Arnould and Price, 2000; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Therefore, identities are fluid and flexible for symbols, ideologies and lifestyles emerging in the marketplace and new self-narratives are told. Thompson (1995, p. 210) even describes consumers identity projects as *symbolic projects* where consumers employ available symbolic materials that form coherent accounts of the self-concept. Consumer identity projects are also expressed and understood through self-narratives, that weave together the past, present and future conceptions of the self and relationships to others (Arnould and Price, 2000).

The current chapter is an introduction to the identity projects of the postmodern consumer. First, I will explain why consumers construct their identities through different life projects and roles. Then, I will move on to the role of cultural symbols, ideologies and rituals in the marketplace and how they move from culturally constituted world to the individual consumers and back. The emphasis is on subcultures and experiences as consumables, that also the Louis Vuitton exhibitions entail. Finally, I will discuss on research on how people carry out their social and personal identities through consuming experiences.

### 2.1 The postmodern consumer

In contemporary Western culture, consumers are caught in the crossfire of different processes that evoke new problems affecting consumers' selfhood and collective identity. The current historical period is described as a postmodern era, characterized by globalization, deterritorialization, fragmentation and hyperreality that have changed the conceptions of the self and of the society (Arnould and Price, 2000; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). To solve the problems caused by these processes, consumers constantly recompose

their sense of the self, their identities and community through consumption (Arnould and Price, 2000; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). This results in consumers' variety of life projects and roles that help to understand the "true" self and own belongingness to different societies.

The multifaceted and disordered world situation causes consumers' feelings of losing sense of reality, uncertainty, risk and need for experimentation (Arnould, 2005). In such conditions, consumers feel personal meaningless and divorced from the society that is balanced by producing the self, self-image and community membership – function that covers the construction of one's life project (Arnould and Price, 2000; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). In this sense, consumers' life projects and roles are temporal components of the identity that reveal and produce one's self-concepts as part of certain cultures, societies and communities. Consumers express their life projects and roles in a form of different life-narratives that organize their life experiences into an understandable whole (Arnould and Price, 2000). Viewing the past, present and future conception of the self in a form of a narrative integrates them together yet allowing multiple selves and narratives to overlap (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

According to Arnould and Price (2000), consumers' self-narratives are created and maintained through authenticating acts and authoritative performances. Consumers are always in the struggle for self and community that these two processes present. Authenticating acts are expressions of the "true" self, emptied from the meanings, roles or other consumers. This orientation emphasizes uniqueness, spontaneity, surprise and intrinsic valuing. In contradiction, authoritative performances offer integration, creation of collective identities and feelings of community. The objects enabling these kind of performances – family, ethnic group or brand community for instance – create value to the consumer in a form of membership, feeling of belonging and security. Rituals, traditions, rehearsal and stylization practiced in the society characterize authoritative performances. (Arnould and Price, 2000). By carrying out authenticating acts, consumers construct their personal identity projects whereas consuming authoritative performances develops their social identities (Ricoeur, 1992). Therefore, in the postmodern world where consumers are pushed towards individuality and rootlessness, consumers balance the lack of belonging by simultaneously creating life narratives of sameness and separation. This is done by consuming symbolic resources as marketplace is full of different images, practices and models embodying authentication and authoritative performances (Arnould and Price, 2000).

## 2.2 Symbolic consumption and identity construction

As the postmodern times have remarkably changed the conception of the society and the self, also the practices of consumption have been repositioned to the center of all activity (Uusitalo, 1998). This is because by consuming marketplace symbols, ideologies, lifestyles and cultures that are embodied in consumables, symbolic meanings are transferred into the life projects and life roles of a consumer (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988; Mick and Buhl, 1992). Thus, consumption is a mean for realizing authenticating acts and authoritative performances and balancing the tensions and anxieties of a postmodern consumer. The products are no longer consumed because of their utility value but their symbolic value that is evaluated based on how well it contributes to the current life projects and roles (Arnould et al., 2006; Levy, 1959). Similarly, marketplace is a source for symbolic resources that either enforces the personal identity or engage consumers to shared traditions and connections between individual and community (Arnould and Price, 2000; Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

As Levy (1959) stated already half a century ago, “people buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean”. Indeed, every product carries meanings and vice versa, meanings can be coded into a consumable form. In addition to tangible products, this goes also for services and experiences that can embody different symbols, ideologies and lifestyles in a form of actions and performances. For example, by consuming the self-sufficient festival of Burning Man, consumers carry out the ideology of communality and disparaging market logics (Kozinets, 2002). Also, Coca-Cola drink brings out meanings of cheerfulness and family-oriented lifestyle when consumed that also signifies the American culture (Aaker et al., 2001).

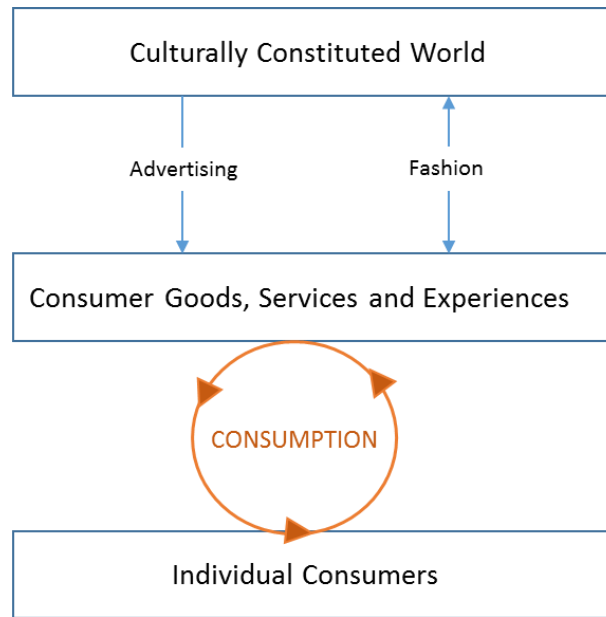


Figure 2: Movement of meaning (modified from McCracken (1986))

These kind of collective representations of specific cultural meanings are called *symbolic resources* that consumers experience and exploit in the marketplace (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). McCracken (1986) introduced how the meanings move from culturally constituted world to the consumer goods, services and experiences that then, are consumed as symbolic resources by individual consumers (figure 2). Advertising and fashion systems act as instruments of meanings transfer in this process. Advertising system conveys cultural meanings into consumer goods through the creative processes of the marketing professionals. It offers value propositions to the audience in a form of images, narratives and brandscapes and this is how brands are transformed into symbolic resources (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Fashion system, on the other hand, also invents new meanings and engages them back to the culturally constituted world through the actions of opinion leaders. Therefore, whilst individuals consume symbolic resources they also produce and rework their meanings and the culturally constituted world (Arnould et al., 2006; Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). This makes marketplace a socio-cultural oasis of dynamic symbolic resources that are welcomed to consumers' lives through consumption.

Individuals are in a constant urge for self-completion and they fill the lack of personal quality by consuming symbolic resources in the marketplace (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Consuming, in this sense, is not merely shopping or buying but it is an activity in which

consumers enter marketplace situations to incorporate symbolic resources into their incomplete life projects and roles (Jackson and Holbrook, 1995). Kleine et al. (2000) proposes that in the marketplace, consumers exploit their prior knowledge, so called *schemas* of different roles and subculture meanings that are achieved earlier in social interaction with the subculture members. When entering marketplace situations, consumers carry out these learned behavioral models in order to construct and maintain such life projects and roles. For instance, some consumers realize their life projects of higher social status by resonating with advertisements of high fashion and focusing on enacting schemas of such lifestyle (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Thus, by consuming higher status symbols, consumers engage themselves to different subcultures and that is how the identity is emerged.

### *Consumption of subcultures*

Each individual is engaged to multiple different groupings of culture and taste simultaneously and with a varying degrees of intensity (Uusitalo, 1998). Influenced by the cultural studies approach, the concept of *subcultures* is established to describe these groupings of cultural meanings and lifestyle (Thornton, 1996) that most often in marketing research takes a form of *consumption of subcultures* (Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Subcultures are instantiated based for example on their social class, ethnic background, age or gender in specific socioeconomic environments but also on different activities and contexts that consumers share within a subculture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Despite the origin, almost all subcultures reflect symbolic resources that consumers can consume to indicate their community membership. Therefore, consuming symbolic resources of subcultures is considered as authoritative performances that enforce their social identity and belonging (Arnould and Price, 2000).

Due to the fragmented nature of the postmodern era, ethnical origin, social class or even gender are no longer self-evident concepts for consumers (Arnould and Price, 2000; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). In consumers attempts to anchor themselves into dynamic and sometimes invisible societies, socio-historic subcultures form around consumable objects such as rituals, ethnic costumes, food and music (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The consumable objects of specific culture help consumers to integrate, maintain and develop their participation and communal identity within that subculture (Peñaloza, 1994). In the case of Coca-Cola, it has reached an iconic position as a symbolic resource for American



culture (Aaker et al., 2001) whereas meanings of luxury fashion are highly influenced by the French (Fionda and Moore, 2009). By consuming these products or lifestyles, consumers bring out ethnic subcultures in a more understandable form and further rework the meanings within.

Another distinction of subcultures is based on different activities and contexts that consumers share within a group (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). These subcultures are lifestyle groups where the community membership depends entirely on consumer's consuming style (Wilska, 2002). Considerable attention has been put on youth subcultures, such as Partille Johnnys of Sweden (Lindblad and Ostberg, 2011) and Star Trek fandom (Kozinets, 2001), that are based on shared lifestyle practices. In contrast to socio-historical formation of subcultures, the social status in these subcultures is achieved through ownership of cultural value that is, knowledge and skills that are considered as valuable within the culture, and ability to rework meanings shared by group members (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). For example, consuming art exhibitions is a symbolic ritual for members to show their interest towards and membership to a specific art subculture (de Rojas and Camarero, 2008). Also many brands have their own subcultures that are maintained through collective consumption practices (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, the social identity projects direct subculture members into consuming meanings and symbolic objects in order to achieve the solidarity and feeling of belonging.

### *Consumption of experiences*

Also experiential consumption activities often produce collective identifications based on shared meanings, rituals or social practices (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In a way, experiences are subjective states of consciousness with symbolic meanings and aesthetics shaping it (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Indeed, consumers seek for multisensory stimuli, emotional arousal and fantasy aspects through consumption of certain experiences such as art exhibitions, novels or sport events (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Research has also illuminated the role of peak experiences and flow experiences on consumers' life project construction (Carù and Cova, 2003). However, despite the highly individual ways of experiencing, also these experiences are brought as consumable, symbolic resources in the marketplace. Therefore, consumption of experiences also creates different kinds of subcultures that with consumers construct their life projects.

One conceptualization of experiential consumption are the *extraordinary experiences* that are based on the perception of its newness, activated by unusual events that pursue high levels of emotional intensity (Ahola, 2005; Arnould and Price, 1993). The newness of the experience is tied to consumers' ongoing social, cultural and personal life projects of renewal that they construct by participating extraordinary experiences (Abrahams, 1981). One example of a consumable extraordinary experience is skydiving that forms a subculture for lovers of high-risk behavior and often its communal rituals is the motive for doing it (Celsi et al., 1993). This way, skydiving is an authoritative performance enforcing the sameness inside the subculture through the common notions of newness. Being part of that lifestyle contributes to life projects of bravery, experimentation and freedom and life role of an adventurous and fearless person.

Extraordinary experiences can also signify authenticating acts since their newness and emotional intensity clears the consumer of the symbolic meanings and life roles which reveals the "true" self of a consumer (Abrahams, 1981; Arnould and Price, 2000). In the skydiving experience, the jumpers are temporally liberated from their everyday life and their ordinary statuses and roles at the moment of free fall (Celsi et al., 1993). Similarly, authenticating acts can be experienced in art exhibitions (Carù and Cova, 2011), in the nature (Tumbat and Belk, 2011) and within religious rituals enhancing consumer spirituality (Davies and Freathy, 2014) that distance the consumer from the situation. According to Tumbat and Belk (2011), exposure to or immersion in subcultures is an inherent social requirement that through consumers seek for liberating, transforming and creative antistructure where daily statuses and roles no longer matter. Thus, extraordinary experiences promote individual renewal – setting oneself free for upcoming identity competition in the marketplace.

### 3. Resource-based theory of the consumer

In their groundbreaking theory of the new service-dominant logic (S-D logic), Vargo and Lusch (2004) presented a shift in marketing from producer-receiver perspective to experience-centric focus (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). A central idea of the S-D logic is that the value is created in dialectical processes using both firm- and customer-based resources as inputs. This is based on the view that in the marketplace, “services are exchanged for services” (Bastiat, 1964) meaning that all actors apply their resources to gain utility in the service encounter where the interaction happens. In this interaction the emphasis is on consumers’ actions and thus, they are considered as co-creators of value whereas firms can only offer symbolic resources to the consumers to interpret (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Following this thought, Arnould et al. (2006) introduced a resource-based theory of the consumer<sup>1</sup> that explains how consumers build their life projects with their own economic, social, cultural and physical resources, using firm-based value propositions as symbolic resources. Thus this theory considers marketplace as a source for potential symbols, ideologies and subcultures that consumers can create valuable experiences with, and again, add these experiences in their life projects.

In this chapter, I will introduce the resource-based theory of the consumer by Arnould et al. (2006). Whilst emphasizing the role of firm- and consumer-based resources in consumption and the co-creation of value, through the theory we are able to answer how consumers rework symbolic meanings encoded in objects in the marketplace to meet their goals (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In my research, I specifically explore how consumers enter service encounters to exploit operand and operant resources to consume symbolic resources that fulfil their life projects and narratives. Therefore, acquiring the resource-based theory from the perspective of consumers offers valuable insight into how they craft experiences and realize the projects they choose (Arnould, 2005).

I will start by explaining what is the difference between operand and operant resources, later focusing mainly on consumers’ deployment of their cultural, social and physical operant resources in the marketplace situations. Later, I will continue discussing how value is co-

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<sup>1</sup> The original name by Arnould et al. (2006) is the resource-based theory of *the customer* but discussing about *the consumer* is more suitable for this research.

created in the marketplace situations where firms offer their value propositions while consumers aim at constructing their life projects and roles by consuming them as symbolic resources.

### 3.1 Operand and operant resources

The service-dominant logic (S-D logic) introduced by Vargo and Lusch (2004), changed the focus from firm-generated offerings to consumer co-creation and revolutionized the view on resources, distinguishing operand resources from operant resources (figure 3). The resource-based theory of the consumer by Arnould et al. (2006) continued this thought by explaining how brands' value propositions and consumers' life projects are constructed by activating operand and operant resources. *Operand resources* are tangible, culturally formed economic resources such as consumers' physical possessions (e.g. income, apartments or clothing) or spaces (e.g. plot of land or garden) or firm's products, raw materials or storage buildings. Operand resources don't entail value per se but are made valuable through human actions. For example, objects of the childhood are imbued with feelings of familiarity only if used during that time (Fournier, 1991) or the Coca-Cola drink wouldn't have a role as symbolic resource for cheerfulness if not through their advertising system (Aaker et al., 2001; McCracken, 1986). Thus, operand resources are something that has to be made action on to make the effect (Constantin and Lusch, 1994). Therefore, operand resources are central in the moment of consumption as they influence significantly on how consumers' deploy their operant resources.

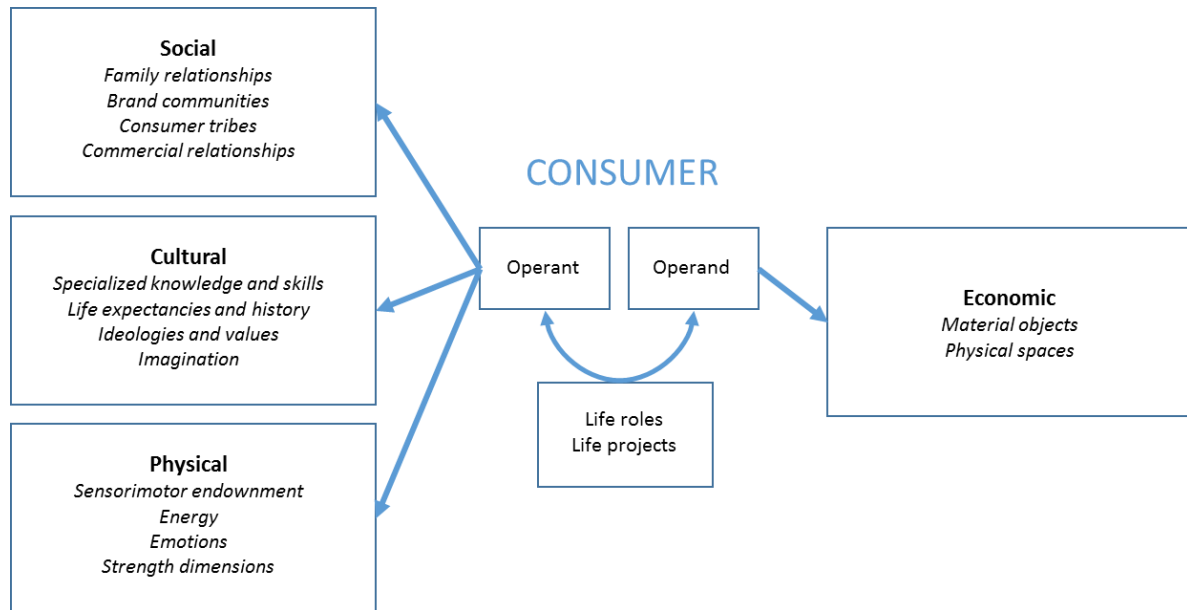


Figure 3: Consumers' operand and operant resources (modified from Arnould et al. (2006))

Even though the operand resources are important in the interaction between a firm and a consumer, the main focus of the resource-based theory of the consumer is on the intangible, *operant resources* that act on the operand and other operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). From firm perspective, operant resources can be skills or capabilities of the employees or data banks holding valuable knowledge. However, in most cases operant resources are tied to consumers for example, as social relationships, fantasies or emotions. Therefore, Arnould et al. (2006) present that consumers' operant resources can be categorized into physical, social and cultural ones, as seen in the figure 3. While operant resources add the value to tangible operand resources, they also create new operant resources. For example, in cooking lessons consumers use their personal skills to make the meal out of the firm-provided materials and at the same time, they improve their cooking skills further. Applying operant resources makes the product 'extended' as the value of it is determined by the consumers in the interaction with the firm (Ngo and O'Cass, 2009). This is because consumers' operant resources define which firm-based resources customers draw on and what is the role of firm's products and services in this value-creation process (Arnould et al., 2006). Therefore, compared to operand resources, consumers' operant resources have greater influence on their consumption behavior.

### *Physical operant resources*

Consumers' physical operant resources include sensorimotor endowment and energy, emotions and strength dimensions i.e. all the senses and the post-reactions that the stimuli to them affects (Arnould et al., 2006). Consumers differ significantly in how they observe their environment and for example, what emotions different environmental cues (e.g. lightning, package design, distractions) trigger. Consumers are also able to distinguish and categorize their consumption experiences based on the emotions that they evoke (Richins, 1997). For example, the feeling of surprise is elicited by schema discrepancy that is a process that with consumers evaluate the newness of the event based on their prior experiences (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). This is followed by physiological and behavioral reactions, such as changes in heart rate and facial expressions Consumers consider the surprising experience either as positive or negative that significantly affects what other emotions follow. These emotions give consumers a wide scale for categorizing different life events that again, act as reference points for other unexpected events in the future.

### *Social operant resources*

When interacting with other people in the marketplace, consumers use and create their social operant resources. In addition to commercial relationships, social operant resources comprise family- and friends group relationships, brand communities and consumer tribes (Arnould et al., 2006). Social operant resources are based on the idea of people having natural need for acceptance and belonging and therefore, their existence is a requirement for authoritative performances. Interpersonal attachments guide the emotional and cognitive processes, produce behavioral responses and increase humans' health and well-being (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Therefore, the social interactions play a central role in the marketplace situations as well. It is widely acknowledged in the marketing research that consumers' ethnic background, social class, gender and strength of the connectedness between social groups have influence on their patterns of consumption and life projects (e.g. Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Levy, 1981; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Family relationships or friendship groups as operant resources, for example, can mean shared value

of ethicality within that subculture that connects the members together mentally and possibly, through consumption of sustainable products.

Brand communities and consumer tribes are a central theme in the socio-historic side of consumer culture. Brand community is “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.” that act as a form of consumer agency and as an information resource for consumers (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Being part of a brand community gives consumers communal power and thus, creates social benefits that fulfil consumer’s need for belongingness. The core of the brand communities are the dynamic relationships between the consumer and a brand and especially, other community members (Algesheimer et al., 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002). These relationships can be considered as a ‘linking value’ embedded in the products and services (Cova, 1997). The difference between brand communities and brand tribes is thus in the depth of these relationships. Consumer tribes are brand communities whose members consciously act on the brand by adding to them, altering them and incorporating them in their own lives (Cova et al., 2012). In other words, consumer tribe members have such a deep passion towards the brand that they activate the subculture around the brand to be what it is, plunder the identity of it and extend it to new dimensions by consuming it.

What is important to acknowledge when discussing on social operant resources is the link between social groups and culturally shared knowledge, that is within cultural operant resources. Community members, whether of a family, friends group or a brand tribe, share at least partly common understandings and schemas of related patterns of behavior, knowledge, skills, values, emotions and meanings. In other words, they are similarly culturally sensitive (Ridley et al., 1994; Torelli and Ahluwalia, 2012) as specific symbolic resources activate the same associations among society members. The experience also creates new knowledge associations and schemas. In their study of the brand meanings in the new Star Wars movies, Brown et al. (2003) found that the fans of the movie series shared the association to the consumer ideology of good versus evil. Also, Star Wars conveyed nostalgic meanings in their retro branding, activating associations to their childhood delight. By sharing the understanding of the brand meanings and experiencing same nostalgic emotions, consumers are able to truly connect with each other and thus, exploit and develop their social operant resources by consuming symbolic resources of Star Wars.

### *Cultural operant resources*

As the example of the Star Wars fandom illustrates, consumers use their cultural operant resources while creating social connections and cultural consensus within a community. Arnould et al. (2005, 2006) define consumers' cultural operant resources as specialized knowledge and skills, life expectancies, history, ideologies, values and imagination. Thus, cultural operant resources guide how consumers interpret the symbolic resources. No doubt cultural operant resources rise above and prevail in other operant and operand resources in the marketplace since that is the environment where consumers "create distinctive, fragmentary, self-selected, and sometimes transient cultural worlds through the pursuit of common consumption interests" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Therefore, cultural operant resources are firmly harnessed to individual's meaning-making, sense of the world and of the self.

Consumers always employ their cultural operant resources when entering marketplace situations as schemas, previous knowledge and skills are needed to create meanings out of new experiences and as they guide consumers social behavior (Arnould, 2005). As explained, individual's understanding on new information is based on what he or she already knows (Garro, 2000). Also, existing schemas can be applied in variety of contexts or new situations (Arnould et al., 2006; Kleine et al., 2000) for example, the skills in maintaining body balance can be exploited in all skateboarding, surfing and snowboarding. In contrast to individual skills, cultural resources of abstract knowledge and moral values are represented and shared as cultural ideologies within the society (Borghini et al., 2009). These ideologies are consumed in the marketplace, for example, by buying Nike's Air Jordan shoes consumers either consciously or unconsciously manifest the ideology of individual achievement through perseverance (Sherry, 1998). By understanding the metaphors and symbolic resources of a dominant culture, consumers find meaning in the rituals they manifest and thus, they rework their life projects, roles and sense of the world (Brown et al., 2013)

Consumer's high stock of cultural operant resources tend to result in conspicuous and hedonic consumption (Allen, 2002; Holt, 1998; Peters, 2004). These kind of consumers are in a pursuit of a dream world and dream self that is discharged by consuming utopian commodities, such as tourist destinations or theme parks (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). These ludic environments help consumers to activate their imagination and tie ideologies of



the perfect world to their life projects (Arnould, 2005; Maclaran and Brown, 2001). For a child, visit to Disney World enhance the perception of a perfect reality that he or she can transmit into his or her everyday lives and life roles. Similarly, by using social and moral ideals of an American father, a male consumer can carry out those roles and life expectancies through precise evaluation on how the family visit to Disney World fall within this role (Holt, 2003, 2002). Such festive environments arouse consumers' dreams and realize them through play. Thus by making hedonic consumption choices, consumers reflect not only their utopian worldview but also society's ideologies, values, consciousness and attitudes (Maclaran and Brown, 2001).

### 3.2 Co-creation of value in the service encounters

Consumer value is one of the most fundamental concepts in all marketing activities and it has gained considerable attention in the consumer behavior research during the past few decades (Holbrook, 1999). Even so, the question of what value is and how value is created in the marketplace seems to polarize academic field in marketing. Contemporary research on value creation acknowledges that the value forms within the interaction of a firm and a consumer (e.g. Anker et al., 2015; Grönroos, 2011; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). However, most of the research focuses mainly on discussing on the process of value creation from the perspective of a firm and fails to give insights into what drives consumers into the value-creation process (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Fuller, 2010; Grönroos, 2011).

Under the cover of service-dominant logic and consumer culture perspective, the resource-based theory of the consumer considers value creation as an interaction of a firm- and a consumer-based operand and operant resources (Arnould et al., 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). For consumers, service encounters (e.g. retail stores or exhibitions) are a source for potential resources where they can create valuable experiences and this way add symbolic resources to their life projects. At the same time firms pursue their own goals by offering consumers value propositions that are a result of the implementation of their firm-based resources. Consumer value in this context is considered as an "interactive relativistic preference experience" that requires "evaluation of some object (e.g. product) by some

subject (e.g. consumer)” (Holbrook, 1999). Therefore, consumers consider value as symbolic resources that improve their life projects and roles. In the interaction of the firm and a consumer, the value propositions act as such symbolic resources that consumers interpret. This way, by evaluating the impact of firm’s value proposition to the development of one’s self-project, consumers choose which commodities are welcomed in their own lives.

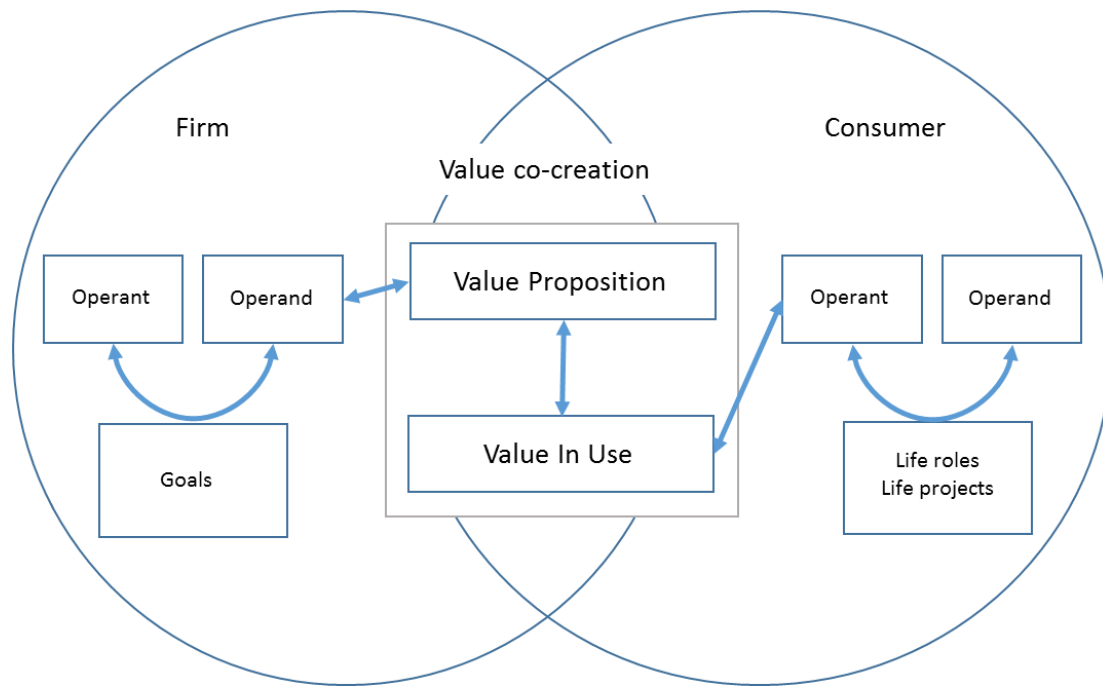


Figure 4: Co-creation of value through operand and operant resources (modified from Arnould et al. (2006))

As mentioned, when a consumer and a firm encounter in the marketplace, they both employ their operand and operant resources in this interaction. As the figure 4 illustrates, firms bring in their value propositions which are encoded in the products and services, altered by the use of firm’s operant resources (Arnould et al., 2006). This means that firms are not distributors of value nor do the products or services contain value per se that consumers passively receive (Gummesson, 1998). Instead, the firms invite consumers to co-create value by offering products and services that are encoded with appealing symbolic resources that consumers interpret. As an example, the new Star Wars movies replicated elements that were used in the previous movies which attracted consumers who interpreted these elements as nostalgic (Brown et al., 2003). In this case, the value proposition of Star Wars for these consumers

was for example ‘an opportunity to travel back in time’ that contributed to life projects to maintain life continuity.

Consumers incorporate the symbolic meanings into their own lives by activating their operant resources (Arnould et al., 2006). As consumers consume the symbolic resources from a cultural text, e.g. from an advertisement that communicates brand’s value proposition, they use their prior experiences as a basis for understanding new meanings in it (Scott, 1994). In the case of Star Wars, the value proposition of time-travel was transformed into a feeling of childhood delight when an individual interpreted it based on his past experience with the movie brand (Brown et al., 2003). These symbolic resources are incorporated into consumers’ life projects through life narratives (Arnould and Price, 2000). Therefore, as different consumers interpret the symbolic resources in different ways and express these in their life narratives, also firms’ value propositions are constantly reshaped in the marketplace (Arnould et al., 2006; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Hence while the story of Star Wars evolves in the new movies, new meanings and associations are shared among consumers and this gives the brand a new frame. This way consumers bring ‘value in use’ to the production process of meanings that modify and develop the value propositions further (Arnould et al., 2006).

This illustrates that the co-creation of value is highly dependent on the context and on consumer’s cultural and social background (Feick et al., 2003; Kozinets, 1997). Consumers are willing to co-create value with the firm only if they are able to benefit from it, i.e. if they are able to achieve their context-dependent life goals. If consumer’s goal is to feel and look young, cultural and social context determine what products or behavioral models are approved to pursue this goal, whether it is using anti-aging cream or being a fan of Star Wars movies. Pursuing specific goals originates from consumers’ current life roles and -projects. These goals also determine what is perceived as valuable symbolic resource for the consumer. As life project is “the construction and maintenance of key life roles and identities” (Huffman et al., 2000) that lessen the anxieties of a postmodern consumer, it can be seen as fundamental goal for consumption. If a consumer is pursuing a life project of a person who never grows up, he or she is likely to set goals and adopt behavioral models that contribute to it. Through consumption of cultural ideologies that embody shared meanings of youth, a consumer develops his or her life project that evens out the tensions of the adulthood and this way, creates unique value to the youth-seeking consumer.

The process of value co-creation from the perspective of resource-based theory demonstrates that the firms have no longer a full control over the value creation in the marketplace (Holt, 2002). Instead, firms and their value propositions are an operant resource for customers who create their life projects as “particular cultural production systems, such as marketing communications or the fashion industry (McCracken, 1986; Thompson and Haytko, 1997) systematically predispose consumers toward certain kinds of identity projects” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Vice versa, customers are considered as an operant resource for firms and their value propositions (Arnould et al., 2006). In the interaction both the customer and the firm seek for value but at the same time they create the physical, social and cultural contexts around them. As Brown et al. (2003) state, symbolic resources are not merely cognitive associations of meanings but when integrated with consumers’ life projects, they become story-based, social universes. From this point of view, consumers constantly create and live within different life-worlds that are framed by the negotiation of meanings with own socio-cultural background, other consumers and brands.

According to Kozinets et al. (2004), firm-provided value propositions can activate consumers operant resources in a way that guides their mental attention, experiences and self-narration. In other words, through the interpretation of symbolic resources, these experiences enable consumers to create their self-projects and engage with valued others (Arnould and Price, 2000). These thoughts summarize why consumers seek for new experiences and what is perceived as value: consumers pursue resource interaction in order to shape their life projects and goals (Arnould et al., 2006; Sewell, 1992) that again, are created to balance the tensions and anxieties of a postmodern consumer (Arnould and Price, 2000). Value is also the right for future use of operant resources, cited previously as ‘value in use’, that is stored in consumers’ life-worlds to be incorporated in one’s life project later when such a goal appears (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Consequently, firms gain value through consumers’ employment of firm-provided and consumer-based resources that shape the value proposition in unpredictable ways.

## 4. Framework for the research

In the previous chapters, I have created a comprehensive overview on Arnould's et al. (2006) resource-based theory of the consumer in which they successfully unite ideas of the S-D logic and symbolic consumption to bring consumer in the locus of the value co-creation concept. An introduction on how consumers create their identity projects through interpretation of symbolic resources lay the ground for the resource-based theory and it is needed to fully understand the fundamental reason why consumers engage in interaction with firms and their value propositions. The union of the symbolic consumption and the resource-based theory of the consumer forms a coherent whole that I use as an academic lens for analyzing the data of this research.

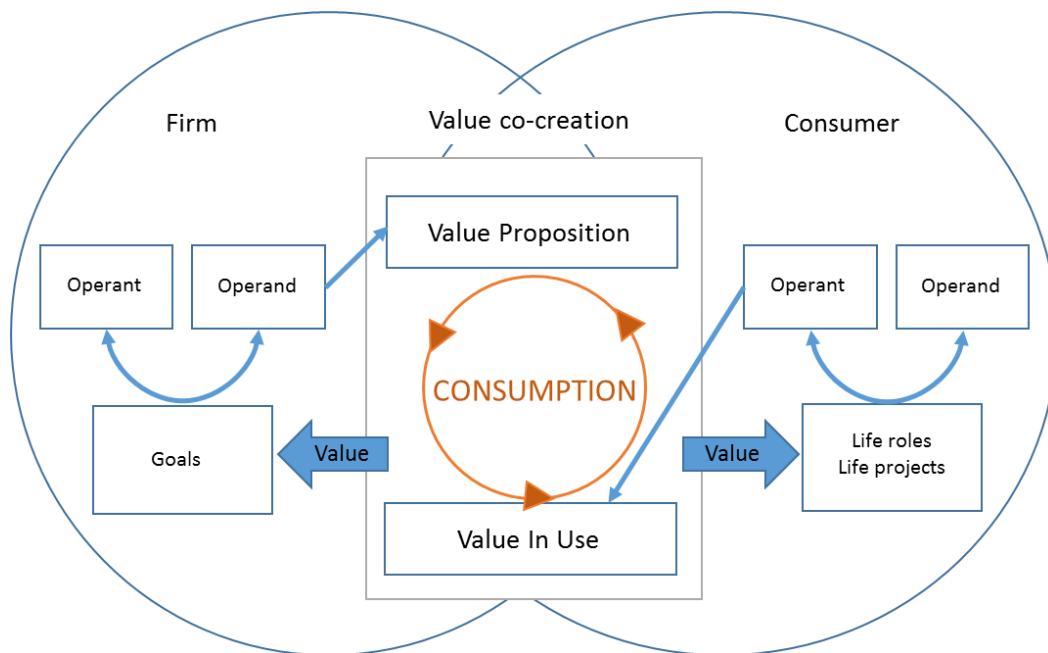


Figure 5: Framework for the research

To summarize the two theories, I have created a new framework in figure 5 for consumers' value co-creation that better illustrates the interaction between firm- and consumer-based resources and how symbolic meanings and value is created in this interaction. When consumers enter to the experience, that is the value co-creation portion in the figure, they are encountered with firm's value proposition (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). This value proposition

is encoded with different marketplace ideologies, symbols or values as symbolic resource. This way, firms' deploy their operant resources to give their operand resources meaning (Arnould et al., 2006). In the consumer-firm interaction, these value propositions are interpreted by the consumers. What is central in consumers' interpretation is the employment of operant and operand resources and the current life projects and roles that drive them consuming specific value propositions in the marketplace (Kozinets et al., 2004). Consumer goals also determine how well the firm-provided meanings add value to these projects.

I believe that this framework gives further understanding in which operand and operant resources engage consumers to interact with the firm in the marketplace and on the other hand, which consumer-based resources play central role when consumer evaluates firms' value propositions. Through the framework we are also able to study what is perceived as valuable for each life project of the consumer in the exhibitions of Louis Vuitton.

## 5. Methodology

In this chapter, I will present the research philosophy this research is based on. I will also explain the research method and illuminate the narrative analysis that is used to interpret the data. Finally, I will give an overview on the research context – Louis Vuitton and the two exhibitions of *SERIES3* and *Volez, Voguez, Voyagez* that are described based on my personal observation and images taken at the time of data collection. Pictures of these exhibitions can be found in appendices 10.2 and 10.3.

### 5.1 Interpretive approach

My research focuses on getting a holistic view of the customer experience with qualitative research methods. The aim is to find relevant meanings and patterns of experience in the exhibition situations and thus, the research is based on interpretive approach. It supports the argument of the research that the meanings are produced through cultural processes (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). As these meanings are produced and shared with others, they become subjective realities that are socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). This inherits the idea that the experience depends always on the context – e.g. place, time, other people and personal history, and that there are as many realities as there are people experiencing it (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). As people make sense and build their realities, they are also voluntaristic in interacting with the elements in the context. Thus, customers interpret experiences in order to act (Blumer, 1969) and this research tackles into these interpretations and actions of customers.

The goal of this research is to seek understanding on the consumer experience rather than provide generalizable analysis on it (Kinsella, 2006). Understanding is seen as an ongoing process that gives ingredients on future interpretations and they should be seen always as incomplete, as “to-be-completed” because language, customs, meanings and culture are continuously reworked in the joint activities of individuals (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Interpretations made before influence on the current interpretations as well as they influence on future interpretations. However, predictions on future experiences and phenomena cannot

be made based on the understanding achieved in previous research. Therefore, researcher can never achieve *the* understanding but *an* understanding of the current (Denzin, 1984).

To gain broader implications from the lived customer experiences, this research uses hermeneutic framework (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Whereas interpretive approach explains the axiological, overriding goals of our research, the hermeneutic model of Thompson (1997) presents how the stories of individuals' experiences are interpreted against their personal history. In other words, consumers' stories are constructed in their cultural frames of reference and that helps them to create meanings. Therefore, it is necessary to evoke discussion through which people "make sense" of their lives, with language and narrative that reveal the meanings in their stories (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979). Therefore, Thompson's (1997) framework of meanings construction in people's life stories is useful in this research. It allows the research to observe the complex relationships and personalized meanings in the dialogue, narrative and texts.

## 5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Showing respect to the interpretive approach, this research aims at diving into the human consciousness and subjectivity to find the underlying meanings embedded in the social life (Burrell and Morgan, 1985). Therefore, it is relevant to evoke dialogue between the exhibition participants and the researcher. These dialogues often take a narrative form and therefore, the stories of the exhibition participants were revealed through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are based on only a few pre-planned questions that allow the interviewee lead the conversation. This data collection method was chosen because in temporal exhibitions that are located abroad, there was not a chance to interview the visitors more than just once and because most of the visitors were accustomed to efficient use of their time (Bernard, 2011, p. 212). All of the 42 interviews were recorded and later, 37 of these were transcribed into text. After that, these the materials were interpreted with the inductive analysis of narratives (Hammersley, 1992, p. 168) using hermeneutic framework as a guidance.



### 5.3 Narrative analysis

This research bases on the thought that individuals organize knowledge and express themselves through story-telling (Hall, 1997; McAdams, 1990). Thus, people use stories to make sense of themselves and their consumption experiences. To reveal these consumer experiences as lived, I chose to interpret the interview materials using narrative analysis. Instead of describing the world or language itself, narrative analysis interprets the consumption experiences as representations of the world (Riessman, 1993). Narrative is a psycho-social construction, that is owned by the person who tells it but it has also constitutive meanings in the culture (McAdams, 1996). Therefore, through analyzing consumers' life-narratives, we are able to reveal not only the life projects and roles they are currently constructing but also the ideologies, values and consumption practices within the cultural context. These presumptions make narrative analysis ideal for this research.

This research falls within analysis of narratives that is an application of narrative analysis method (Polkinghorne, 1995). It is a narrative type of grounded theory using 'induction' to discover different themes or concepts within the data. It is a suitable method for qualitative research and for data collected from multiple interviews (Hammersley, 1992, p. 168; Riessman, 2004). In the inductive analysis of narratives, the themes derive from the collected data that then forms the final theoretical framework. Also the connections and causalities of different themes can be identified through inductive analysis of narratives. Thus, the focus of the analysis is on the content of the text and therefore, it indicates "what is told" instead of "how are they telling" (Riessman, 2004). Inductive analysis of narratives sets an assumption that everyone in the interview group means the same thing by what they say which puts much emphasis on the investigator's interpretation and the socio-cultural context of the research (Hammersley, 1992, p. 169; Riessman, 2004). However, through analysis of narratives we are able to put together an understandable set of findings that also guides the choice of the final theoretical framework.

I started the inductive analysis of narratives already while doing the interviews but the final themes were formed not until numerous times of data interpretation. The hermeneutic model of Thompson (1997) was used as a guidance for interpreting textual data and mirroring the themes to interviewees' socio-cultural background. The themes were revealed and named through coding process that with I searched for important motivations, ideologies, emotions,

differences and causalities. In addition to identifying the different ways of consuming Louis Vuitton exhibitions, I aimed at finding which resources were used and how the interviewees employed them in the exhibitions. After this, it was easier to refine the findings by interpreting the texts over and over again to find the sources of the value of the consumers. At the same time, the emerging findings formulated the theoretical framework that again, changed the lens for interpretation. This research illustrates how the multisided and complex nature of consumer experiences is organized into an understandable research through consistent analysis of narratives.

## 5.4 Research context

The interviews and ethnographic part of the research were conducted in two separate exhibitions organized by luxury brand Louis Vuitton. Both exhibitions were about Louis Vuitton which made them an interesting context to make a research on highly branded environment. However, the success of the research depends on how well the researcher accounts for details of the context (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Therefore, in the following, I will provide a brief introduction to Louis Vuitton and after, describe the two exhibitions, SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, in my own words to indicate the level of detail in which the context has been interpreted in this research.

### *Louis Vuitton*

The Louis Vuitton (LV) is one of the world's most successful and valuable luxury brands (*2015 BrandZ Top 100 Global Brands*, 2015) established in 1854 in Paris. Its founder, Louis Vuitton himself, started by manufacturing flat trunks with unbreakable locks that made them easy for voyagers to stack and travel safely compared to other trunk makers at that time. The Louis Vuitton, also known as LV, launched its signature Monogram canvas in 1893 by Louis' son Georges Vuitton who also started to grow LV into a worldwide luxury brand after the death of his father. After the World War II Louis Vuitton started also to design leather products, such as small purses and wallets with its Monogram canvas. LV focused on trunks, bags and luggage until 1997 when Marc Jacobs started as their Artistic Director launching LV's first 'prêt-a-porter' clothing collection for women and men. However, still today the bags and luggage are the soul of Louis Vuitton.

The thing that must be acknowledged is that the Louis Vuitton embodies more than just a concept of a luxury fashion. It has built its brand around art, fashion and architecture and uses these themes side by side and as an inspiration to each other, whilst staying loyal to the brand's heritage. Central characteristic of LV is to put significant effort on the retail experience in their stores around the world. They are physical manifestations of blending art, fashion and architecture since the store visuals are often collaborations with internationally renowned artists, designers and photographers whose designs reach also the outer surroundings through store windows. Also Foundation Louis Vuitton in Paris, an

enormous center of art and culture built in 2006 represents the brand's appreciation towards architecture and contemporary artwork.

In addition to the store visuals and the collection of Foundation Louis Vuitton, LV has incorporated branded exhibitions into their marketing communication strategy. As the store visuals, also the exhibitions are a way to present the inspiration for the collections and to link the heritage of Louis Vuitton to the current development of the brand. The focus is on creating superior brand experiences that are open for everyone, delivering resources for visitors to create their own view on Louis Vuitton. My research was done in two different exhibitions by Louis Vuitton: SERIES 3 in London and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez in Paris. Next, there will be a description of how the exhibitions were interpreted from the researcher's point of view.

### *SERIES3 in London*

Louis Vuitton SERIES 3 was a follow-up exhibition to the SERIES 1 and SERIES 2 which all three consisted of an advertising campaign around the current women's clothing collection and the exhibition portraying the creative process of the current Artistic Director of LV, Nicolas Ghesquière. SERIES 1 had been exhibited in Shanghai and Tokyo whereas SERIES 2 was brought to Los Angeles and Rome. Louis Vuitton SERIES 3 in London was open exclusively for a month in September-October 2015 at Somerset House that in line with the LV brand, represents a merge of art, fashion and architecture.

The exhibition consisted of ten different rooms that were set to mirror the inspiration behind women's A/W 2015 collection, the creative process of Ghesquière and his influences with a glance to the heritage of Louis Vuitton. As a visitor stepped in to the Somerset House after possibly queuing outside, he/she was encountered with the reception desk and registered in. There was a separate line for the pre-registered and tour guests. Right beside the reception was the first artwork presenting the new logo of Louis Vuitton. The video showing the transformation of the logo could be seen only through right angle, due to the digital glass beams.

The second room, “The Genesis of a Collection” is the Atrium with a “geodesic dome” in the ceiling. The room plays with lights, temperature changes and feminine voice telling the story on the source of the inspiration in French. The Atrium is followed by the “Master Mind” that is a small space with 360-degree video screens displaying the highlights of LV’s history, Ghesquière’s muses and the products of A/W 15. In the middle of the space there is a white LV trunk with video presenting the muses and sources of inspiration of Ghesquière. The fourth room, “Artists’ hands” demonstrates the craftsmanship of the bags and trunks. There are six tables with screens showing the hands of the craftsmen in through the whole manufacturing process. The room is dark and but full of mirrors reflecting the colored lights.

The fifth room was a remake of the fashion show of A/W 15. There were multiple screens playing the actual catwalk models from the original show and visitors could sit on the stairs to watch. They could also walk through the path that went in between the screens. One song on the playlist of the original fashion show, Röyksopp’s “I had this thing”, was also playing on repeat. After the catwalk-room, the exhibition took the visitor to “The Science of Savoir-Faire” that through light lasers and a video screen created patterns into bags and shoes of the current collection. The room was otherwise completely dark and the audio imitated the course of the lasers. The theme of the manufacturing continued in the seventh room where the French craftsmen of Louis Vuitton were making LV’s signature bags in front of screens showing the detailed work from different angles. The audience was able to ask questions that were translated into French with interpreters.

The next room was completely white, full of the accessories of the latest collection and display tables with the classic LV trunks on them. The “Accessories Gallery” showed the A/W 15 bags, shoes, jewelry and sunglasses on white statues made of Marte Mei van Haaster who is one of the muses of Ghesquière. The statues blend in with the white walls letting the accessories to be the only source of color in the room. The accessories room is followed by the “Walk-in Wardrobe” that is surrounded by mirrors and glass shelves full on clothing and accessories from the A/W 15 collection. The visitors are able to touch the products and feel the materials they are made of.

In between the ninth and 10<sup>th</sup> room, there was a café of the Somerset House. The visitors could have lunch or enjoy beverages while looking at the construction site from wide windows. There was also a stand with Louis Vuitton personnel giving out stickers of the accessories and of letters made with typography imitating Louis Vuitton’s well-known logo.

The last room presented the advertising campaign of the collection. The room was more of a corridor wallpapered with the photos photographed by artists Bruce Weber and Juergen Teller. There were also several video screens playing the campaign video and big SERIES 3 letters on the wall. Also, a Louis Vuitton staff member handed SERIES 3 posters before them continuing to the end of the exhibition.

There were 17 interviews made at the SERIES 3 exhibition, at the café of the Somerset House. The visitors were from different backgrounds e.g. geographically, in social status and age-wise. The interviews were made in two days on 17-18<sup>th</sup> of October at the ending weekend of the SERIES 3 exhibition.

### *Volez, Voguez, Voyagez in Paris*

Volez, Voguez, Voyagez -exhibition in Gran Palais in Paris was built around themes of travelling, transportation and vacation. It was held in December 2015 till February 2016. The focus was in telling the story of Louis Vuitton, from the beginning of his journey to Paris till the latest creations of Nicolas Ghesquière. The exhibition was designed by respected French fashion curator and –historian Olivier Saillard in collaboration with Canadian opera director Robert Carsen.

Volez, Voguez, Voyagez had 14 different spaces that proceeded in more or less chronological order in line with the story of Louis Vuitton. Before entering to the actual exhibition, there was a short introduction on how it all started and what is behind the birth of the company. The first room presented a large portrait of Louis Vuitton and the most known trunk with its signature monogram on a spotlight. After that, there was a room dedicated to wood, said to be the most important material of LV trunks. The walls of the room were made of wood and the smell of it was notable. The old advertisements and contracts from the early 1900's were presented in the glass tables surrounding the space and the walls were full of old pictures of that era. In the middle of the room, there was a collection of old trunk-making tools. The following room was full of different trunks, presenting the innovative solutions of early Louis Vuitton products. They were presented on big wooden boxes and quotes of Vuitton family members on the walls. Most of the trunks were left open to show their inner structure but some of them were closed to present the famous unbreakable locks of the house.

The fourth room opened as a wide space with a large white sail in the middle. On the right side there was a representation of a ship deck with clothing, trunks and more recent LV bags. On the left side, there was a black and white video presenting André Citroën's, who was an early partner of the LV house, plans on travelling across Africa and next to that, a representation of a desert with LV products from the early years to the present. At the end of this room, there were several old fashion magazines in showcase, some of them featuring Louis Vuitton travelling solutions. The theme of travelling by car continued in the fifth room that was a narrow space with a floor painted as a road and surrounded by showcases of motor clothing, suitcases and trunks. Above the showcases, the walls had pictures of green tree tops.

The eye-catcher of the sixth room was an airplane on the wall holding several Louis Vuitton bags on its wings. The passion of Louis' grandsons, Jean and Pierre, for aviation was showed through presenting their small prototypes of airplanes and helicopters in the middle of LV products, aviation documents and pictures of the famous aviators of that time. In the room, there were also two glass boxes presenting Louis Vuitton bags, clothes inspired by the aviation theme from the last decades and some beauty products from the early years of Louis Vuitton.

The following room was in a form of a train car, surrounded by velvet benches and walls made of dark wood. There was a collection of a bags, clothes and products that were suitable for train travelling in the early 1900's. The room was pretty dark and the visitors took the advantage to sit down on the benches to look for the films from the screens that were installed as the train windows. That made an illusion of a moving train car. After the train section, the exhibition presented Louis Vuitton products that were used to carry correspondence equipment and books. Then in the following room, there was a broad collection of the bags with Marc Jacob's graffiti-like designs. In the following room, the walls were covered with paintings that represented the pattern of Louis Vuitton at that time. In addition, there were the special order luggage with butterfly graphics in black natural cowhide leather by Damien Hirst displayed in this room. Next room had a collection of the products made exclusively for celebrities e.g. for Catherine Deneuve, Marthe Chenal and Greta Garbo. There were night gowns, bags and little accessories that had belong to different celebrities during the last decades. There were also products of other notable clients displayed, showing customized luggage and accessories made by Louis Vuitton.

The last room was a collision of the past and the new collection by Nicolas Ghesquière. The round, dark room was surrounded by displays of old clothing pieces and in the middle, there was a rotating platform showing the newest pieces inside a wardrobe luggage. There were spotlights pointing at the pieces. On the wall, there were also screens that were showing the fashion show of Louis Vuitton Fall 2015 RTW collection. At the end of the last room, there was a tribute to Louis Vuitton and his works for musicians, as the curator of this exhibition was an opera director Robert Carsen. In this section, classical music was playing on the background. The instruments, vinyls, sheet music and the Louis Vuitton luggage looked as they were floating in the air, creating a collection of the symbols for music.

There were 25 interviews made in the Volez, Voguez, Voyagez exhibition during 12-14<sup>th</sup> February 2016. Most of the interviewees were French but also Asian, Scandinavian and North American visitors were interviewed. The age breakdown was extensive as youngest interviewees were clearly under 18 and oldest senior citizens.



## 6. Activities of value co-creation

In this section I will present the findings and analysis on the interview data collected in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions. The interpretation of the consumer interviews focused on finding how consumers are able to create value in the marketplace through a careful implementation of different operand and operant resources. The following analysis also shows how consumers use Louis Vuitton exhibitions and their value propositions as symbolic resources in this process. This introduction to my findings sets the scene for four consumer's activities of co-creation that were found in the consumption stories of the visitors.

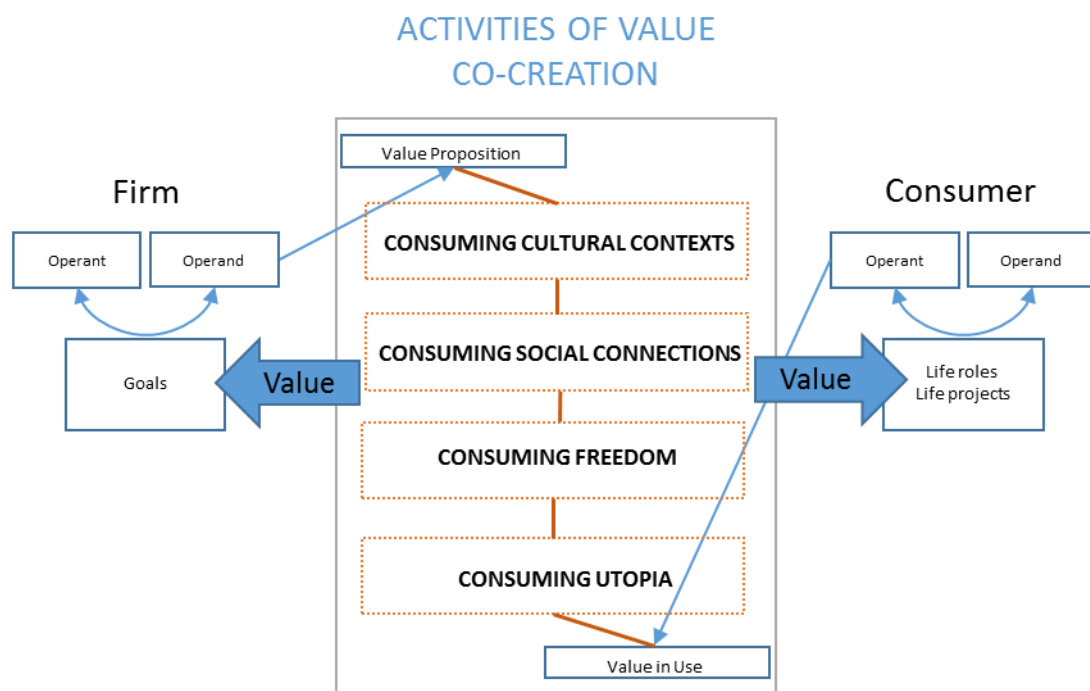


Figure 6: Consumers' activities of co-creation in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions

The figure 5 gives an overview on how the firm value propositions are decoded as valuable meanings through consumer's use of operand and operant resources in the marketplace. What actually creates value to the consumer, are the activities of co-creation that I have categorized in four different entities. In the present section, I justify how consumers consume contexts and social connections, seek for activities that increase freedom in their lives and lastly, build up their dream roles and realities in the context of Louis Vuitton exhibitions. All of these four activities are introduced as their own, abstract entities which each fall into

smaller sub-activities. These activities overlap as the symbolic resources drift from one activity to another. Also the employed operand and operant resources of a consumer that take part in these activities are revealed and analyzed within each activity of value co-creation. This analysis is further developed in the discussion section where the value co-creation activities are applied into the understanding of how consumers perceive value and create their life projects and roles within their self-concept.

## 6.1 Consuming cultural contexts

In the consumer stories, Louis Vuitton is parallel to luxury that is often considered as an exclusive thing that only certain group of people can enjoy of (Fionda and Moore, 2009). Also high culture, that most of the art exhibitions are associated with, echo the interests of niche target groups hiding a specific lifestyle, culture or phenomenon from a wider audience (DiMaggio, 1987). However, as fashion and art are an essential part of Western culture, people have the curiosity towards them as they create context for life (Abbe et al., 2009; Tse et al., 2007). Thus, the need for creating understanding of own life through exhibitions was emphasized in every interview made in SERIES3 and in Volez, Voguez, Voyagez. The main motive for people to visit the two Louis Vuitton exhibitions was to gain exclusive knowledge of the theme they expected the exhibitions to present. The knowledge that was given in the exhibitions was processed by the visitors based on their cultural operant resources – schemas, personal history and prior understanding of life – creating not only their life projects and roles but also the context of Louis Vuitton or art exhibitions. Therefore, interviewees with different backgrounds experienced the exhibitions in slightly different way, paying their attention to different symbolic resources.

### *Context of luxury*

As world's most valuable luxury brand in the world (*2015 BrandZ Top 100 Global Brands*, 2015), Louis Vuitton represents everything that luxury is. In words of Dubois and Paternalt (1995), "luxury is something that is bought for what they mean, beyond what they are". Indeed, luxury as a term was introduced already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Western culture to describe the elite's consumption of commodities that with, they reached the highest status in the society (Jain et al., 2015). The stories of the interviewees indicate that the meanings of

luxury still echo with these assumptions yet the term continuously evolves over time and context. As the interviewees decode Louis Vuitton's value proposition to symbolic meanings within this context, they also prove that Louis Vuitton indeed offers consumers a value proposition of luxury. Thus, SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez as exhibitions are a way to find the meaning in Louis Vuitton and by implication, develop the yet abstract concept of luxury. Since luxury is made unobtainable for the majority of people (Fionda and Moore, 2009), there is a need to find justification for its exclusiveness. Once the doors are opened to the world of Louis Vuitton regardless of the social status, wealth or prior knowledge, people take this opportunity to create their life projects and roles by consuming the context of luxury.

What significantly changes the context and value proposition of luxury is the diffusion of its consumption to the new markets, outside the Western culture (Jain et al., 2015). Bermin from Taiwan, who was visiting her daughter in Paris, was familiar with Louis Vuitton's good position in the Asian markets. He highlighted the need for Asian people to know more about the brand and its background in able to explain the reason for its success:

*Bermin: "Louis Vuitton is a great name for Asian people. We always buy products but know little, very little about the history of the company. And I think the exhibition is great for me, there I learned a lot. I didn't know the history about the company and how they used to design a product. So that's a wonderful, very great impression for me."*

In his quote Bermin assumed that Asian consumers do not pay enough attention to the origin of the luxury products they buy. In this way, they might tell a story of Louis Vuitton in their life narratives without knowing the story themselves and represent things that might be in contradiction with the meanings they think the product conveys. Bermin's quote brings up a dilemma of interpreting symbolic resources in two separate cultures that have different shared ideologies, values or worldviews (Peñaloza, 1994). To truly understand what Louis Vuitton stands for, the symbolic meanings have to be created in the original cultural environment that is, in the Western culture in Paris where it all started (Jain et al., 2015). Vice versa, to truly understand the Western culture, it is important to explore its' cultural artifacts (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). For Bermin and his daughter, coming to Paris is a pilgrimage to the home of luxury where Louis Vuitton exhibition plays a central role as an

embodiment of that kind of lifestyle. Being able to see how the Louis Vuitton products were and are made today, visitors could see how that lifestyle is built into the products they buy. When returning back to Taiwan, those details convey the symbolic meanings Bermin created in Paris. Through the consumption of Louis Vuitton, these symbolic meanings build up the culture of luxury and Western culture also in the Asian markets.

As Bermin also tells in his quote, after seeing the exhibition he is also able to see Louis Vuitton as a company rather than merely as a luxury brand that changes significantly how it is perceived. Meanings around the word “company” are often more target-oriented and administrative than with meanings of a brand (Hatch and Schultz, 2003). In addition, Louis Vuitton is presented as a family business that introduces the people behind the story and thus, encodes certain symbolic meanings in its value proposition. When family is used as a symbolic resource, it is associated with family-related values such as trust and loyalty (Craig et al., 2008) Plus, family business is considered to grow along with its changing generations (Aronoff, 2004). This is how Louis Vuitton’s value proposition was interpreted by the visitors in Volez, Voguez, Voyagez as well. The way Louis Vuitton’s story was told in the exhibition humanizes the brand as visitors see him as admirable person, as Chloé, 21-year-old Parisian, did:

Chloé: *“For me it’s kind of like, I’m glad I learned more about [Louis Vuitton] because actually, I didn’t know anything about it. And when I see Louis Vuitton bags on the streets, people wearing Louis Vuitton clothes... today it’s more like “ah, it’s luxury, it’s fashion”. It’s like expensive, it’s like luxury. So I didn’t have really good impression of the brand, I mean, yeah, good impression but it is still expensive, luxury. It doesn’t really affect us. But then you go there and you realize that this guy just started from nothing. Like, ages ago. And he... what he made, what he created it’s just like yeah, really amazing, impressive.”*

As Chloé’s quote reveals, the Volez, Voguez, Voyagez exhibition of Louis Vuitton played with “rags to riches” metaphor that repeats regularly in the Western culture and can be considered as Western consumer ideology (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). “Rags to riches” is based on the universal idea that with hard work everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in life and thus, have access to the luxury lifestyle that Louis Vuitton represents. This ideology is similar to Nike’s ideology of individual achievement through perseverance with Air Jordan shoes (Sherry, 1998). What this means to Chloé, is that through the ideology

she changed the way she engages to Louis Vuitton and the concept of luxury. As she previously thought luxury is meant for someone with more monetary resources and doesn't concern her, through the ideology she was told to have the access to it if she only wants that enough. This also influences how the people wearing Louis Vuitton are interpreted by her. Before visiting the exhibition, she associated them with the superficial, rich lifestyle that she generally doesn't aspire. After the exhibition the symbolic meanings of the ideology are conveyed through the products she sees on the streets and the high respect towards the achievements of Louis Vuitton is transferred into respecting its customers as if they deserve the luxury products for their hard work.

In addition to the luxury lifestyle, the symbolic resource of "rags to riches" ideology was also displayed to be encoded in the products of Louis Vuitton in front of visitors' eyes. For Gurleen, getting knowledge on how the products are actually made triggered the feeling of respect towards Louis Vuitton and its employees:

Gurleen: *"It's just makes you see stuff so much differently. Because you kind of see how the product was made, with the production rather than the finished product. And see how much effort goes into making that product. You see how many skills you need to make the product. Cause the whole the table was full of like, different components. And like, hammers and stuff. And we didn't think that you actually need the hammer to make a bag. So it's quite revealing and it shows quite a lot about the production."*

Gurleen as a 17-year-old young Londoner studying business had little experience on craftsmanship that is often an unsung heritage of European luxury (Jain et al., 2015). Therefore, talent of making such detailed products is perceived as unique dedication to the product, brand and creating value to the customers of Louis Vuitton. The "rags to riches" ideology appeared in the production process where the employee starts with nothing but the components and creates a luxury bag using only her exceptional expertise. The dedication and carefully picked materials are adapted into the perception of the product's quality that again, can be measured in monetary terms, as Anita, middle-aged PR-professional from London, describes:

Anita: *"The fact that they still even though they might have been doing the job for 20 years, when they learn a new bag they have to go back and be trained on how to do that piece by*

*piece, you can kind of now see the money when you buy the product. You can see the justification for it.”*

Anita's quote demonstrates that consumers, who have used to the mass production fashion chains often diminish the high pricing of luxury products due to the hidden heritage and production processes that is, the hidden value propositions of the brand (Jain et al., 2015). In SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez the extent of the process was tied into the large amount of effort and time that with visitors justify the price. This way, the visitors decoded the value proposition of high dedication into monetary measures that is, their economic operand resources which are easier to consumers to understand. This changes the way they think about luxury and potentially, change their intentions to buy it as a self-gift for the hard work they've done, realizing the “rags to riches” ideology in their life projects (Arnould et al., 2006).

As the findings indicate, Louis Vuitton offers a value proposition that, in the interpretation of the visitors, entails meanings within the Western cultural knowledge of luxury, success and family values. How the value proposition is redeveloped in the narratives of the visitors depends on what associations Louis Vuitton exhibitions stir in visitors with different cultural backgrounds (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Levy, 1981). Louis Vuitton participates to the value co-creation with its' core operand resources, its' heritage, specialized skills and business values, that are offered to visitors through variety of operand resources: the bags, employees and art pieces (Arnould et al., 2006). Consumers, on the other hand, bring in their schemas, cultural background, ideologies and moral and social values in the interaction. This way, visitors are able to link the new symbolic resources to their existing knowledge and repeat the story of Louis Vuitton to new audiences through their life narratives (Arnould and Price, 2000).

### *Context of art and fashion*

Whilst seeking for those meanings that Louis Vuitton and luxury fundamentally entail, visitors also consume the contexts of art and fashion in order to understand what these represent in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions. In this matter, art is considered with its' conventional definition as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, for example in a form of architecture, painting or music, that are appreciated

for their esthetics or emotions they invoke (Dewey, 2005). Art pieces are sociocultural symbols that the audience consumes and therefore, act as symbolic resources in the life project construction (DiMaggio, 1987). In addition, fashion is considered as a system in which certain desires or trends of the elite filters down to the mass that often embodies in women's and men's apparel (Blumer, 1969; Holbrook, 1999; McCracken, 1986; Simmel, 1957). Like artwork, also fashion pieces, such as clothing or bags, are also symbolic resources but as the following findings show, fashion and art are considered as separate contexts that are shamelessly merged in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions.

Following this conceptualization of art, interviewees had a perception of a "traditional" art exhibition or a museum that set up expectations for SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez. The general view was that the theme of an exhibition is usually presented in the temporal space with the objects around, protected so that the objects cannot be touched. The meaning of the object is often explained on an information plate, as Natalie, 32-year-old Irish stylist, describes in her quote on her motives for the visit:

Natalie: *"I just wanted to see how they presented the ideas, you know, there's so many exhibitions where you are looking pieces in glass boxes and reading little bit information about it. You know which is fine but it was just nice to see different ways of presenting something."*

As Natalie tells, the way of how the SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez were curated differed a lot from the expectations set on them that were based on the general perception of exhibitions. In this case, pushing the limits of these expectations changes their perception of what is possible in the context of exhibitions and therefore, in the context of art and fashion. Because of their schemas, visitors are used to certain patterns of behavior in the exhibitions and expect to find the knowledge they came there for, find it from where they are conditioned to find it and in a form they are used to receive it from. When experiencing something new at the both Louis Vuitton exhibitions, visitors sought for a reference point that occurred as comparing to the past experiences (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003), that is to the other fashion and art exhibitions:

Rieya: *"I like kind of seeing how different designers or design teams connect to show the works. So [me and my friend] went to the Alexander McQueen exhibition - and it was completely different to this."*

(...)

*It was like, actually absolutely crammed with these --- designs. So very different. This is very like, modern, and minimalistic and very like, futuristic. ”*

By comparing Alexander McQueen exhibition to SERIES3, Rieya uses the meanings created in the previous one to understand the latter. As they are both fashion exhibitions and thus are linked to the same subculture with each other, this comparison is justified (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The focus, however, is on the contrasts between them and this extends the context of art and fashion. In other words, Rieya uses the strategy of finding similarities and differences between the symbolic resources of art and fashion of Alexander McQueen and Louis Vuitton (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). For her, Louis Vuitton's current style is modern whereas McQueen represents the history of fashion. At the same time as she created the meanings around the two brands, she also tells a story of fashion industry in general: in fashion, there is no right answer to how the designs are presented and people have the freedom to decide themselves which trends they prefer. In other words, fashion is a culture that is rich with different symbolic meanings and value propositions that can be incorporated into life projects through consumption (Arnould et al., 2006).

One value proposition that Louis Vuitton represented was the continuity of life. As Rieya's quote indicates, SERIES3 exhibition was described with representations related to the discourse of future. In contrast to the history-themed exhibition of Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, SERIES3 told a story of the current inspiration of the creative director Nicolas Ghesquière and how it was presented in the newest collection, as Anita described:

*Anita: “[The] whole thing about the designer and his inspiration and his aspirations for Louis Vuitton and the collection, it was just really interesting. And the way it was made from start to finish, you know, from his ideas to showing the finished collection which was beautifully presented. ”*

Through the exhibition, visitors could see what is the inspiration behind current Louis Vuitton and thus, what Nicolas means by the elements he has incorporated in the collection (Levy, 1959). This story of his creative process is told with the metaphor of 'rebirth'. 'Rebirth' is based on the ideology that after challenging times one can rise again and be



reborn even greater than before. For Louis Vuitton, this was topical after Nicolas Chesquière had replaced Marc Jacobs after his 16 years of creative direction at Louis Vuitton. Therefore, the SERIES3 exhibition was seen as a story of resurrection and renewal:

Natalie: *“And I know this is temporary space, they transformed everything. You know, it’s like walking into a spaceship or something. You wouldn’t recognize the actual building itself, because they’ve just made it really, suit to their intentions.”*

Laura: *“It was like future and outer space but because I think fashion world is kind of like that, like you are always pushing for the future. It is kind of like a different world. So yeah, I think it spoke well.”*

These quotes of Natalie and Laura describe vividly how the metaphor of ‘rebirth’ was understood by the visitors and transferred into the context of fashion industry. By entering the exhibition, they actually travelled in time and space to a new universe. With the physical elements as exhibitions’ operand resources, such as lights, materials and utilization of technology, SERIES3 activated associations to the science fiction that, according to science fiction historian Brian Stableford, “is primarily concerned with transcending imaginative boundaries, with breaking free of the gravitational force which holds consciousness to a traditional core of belief and expectancy” (Pappas, 1997). Described also as *avant-garde* or *pioneer* by the interviewees, Louis Vuitton entails meanings of breaking the barriers of fashion and pushes the limits of art and architecture. Most importantly, SERIES3 told a story of detaching from Louis Vuitton’s own past while respecting its heritage that further emphasized the metaphor of ‘rebirth’, as Carol, 29-year-old Austrian actuary described:

Carol: *“As a brand I would say it has a very artistic view on things. Because there is a lot of focus in art. And there is also high focus on quality and the manufacturing quality which is always been the case.*

*(...)*

*They always try to mix it up. That was part of the collection, like the classics, that they would always have and they’re like just timeless pieces with the individual ones. They always want to mix up the classics so they’ve always had also the past, that they would take the classic handbag and give it a new twist with either a print on it, just a new thing.*

(...)

*But that's really, I think what they really want [is] to reinvent themselves. Every year again, every season probably."*

For Carol, Louis Vuitton is symbolic resource that derives meanings from its history and cultural background. The classic pieces represent the past and the new, individual ones the future. These two are combined into one reality that renews every season and these meanings create the concept of fashion as a continuous circle. For the audience, new collection of Louis Vuitton is always a rebirth of the brand and has always new meanings embedded in its pieces. This way, visitors were able to construct a time domain for different phases in the context of fashion and reflect their own involvement in this (Feldman and Hornik, 1981). When consumers participate to the time cycle of fashion through consumption of Louis Vuitton exhibitions or fashion pieces, they are able to renew themselves inside out.

Louis Vuitton's value proposition has always embedded meanings in art, fashion and architecture due to its' collaborations with contemporary artists, store layouts and shows in the fashion weeks (Gasparina et al., 2009). SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez were exhibitions that brought these symbolic resources into one experience and for wider audience to be interpreted. This doesn't only broaden the meanings associated with Louis Vuitton but also, the exhibitions showed that the cultures of art and fashion can be merged with LV as a linking factor (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). When visitors encounter new symbolic resources that invoke meanings related to art or fashion, they call cultural operant resources, such as their prior knowledge or ideologies, that are shaped by the schemas to develop the understanding even further (Arnould, 2005; Arnould et al., 2006). This way, the subcultures of art and fashion are reworked and developed by the consumers to incorporate the symbolic resources in their life projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Therefore, these exhibitions set expectations for the future and positioned Louis Vuitton as baseline for art and fashion.

#### *Context of history and future*

While creating context within luxury, art and fashion is a process of understanding mainly the present state and future development of the contexts, associating, comparing and connecting previous experiences to the now creates also the understanding of the past (Garro,

2000). Vice versa, when consumers are able to understand the origin of things, the better they can create their life projects and roles of the present. Indeed, in museums and exhibitions personal learning guides the experience the most (Falk et al., 1998). The educational motives for the visit occurred also in the stories of the visitors in both Louis Vuitton exhibitions but was emphasized in Volez, Voguez, Voyagez which focused on telling the course of Louis Vuitton's life and the history of the company. For Virginia, 21-year-old art history student, the history of the fashion pieces helped her to find the symbolic resources in them as she analyzed the differences between an advertisement of a cloth and the cloth in its historical context:

Virginia: *"[I] definitely [preferred the part with] the old history. I think that's for an audience to not feel like they're just looking at an ad for clothes. They need to have that history. And I really liked all the photos and kind of... those illustrations from like, old magazines. I think those help you understand the present day a lot."*

What Virginia really means by advertisement, is a snapshot of the product in its current context, without telling all the possible meanings it entails and the proof for its being. Like in any exhibition or museum, without adding any information on the piece the responsibility of completing the understanding in the lack of symbolic meanings is on the audience (Arnould et al., 2006). In other words, the less knowledge is given, the more likely consumers don't have enough resources to exploit and construct their life projects with. Receiving stories telling how Louis Vuitton products were like in the beginning and seeing the evolution of them helps the visitors to understand why the products are like they are today. In addition, getting knowledge of the context where the products were used creates the perception of the past and thus that explains the way people are living today. Thus, the consumption of the exhibitions made visitors to engage to the history through the nostalgic value proposition of Louis Vuitton, as Virginia continued about the travel theme of Volez, Voguez, Voyagez illustrates:

Virginia: *"I think you feel kind of like, nostalgia for something that you don't actually... I mean I didn't even live at that time... I felt like I missed it for some reason. Cause I just think that it's so cool that people used to put so much care into their travel and that was something that was so adventurous compared to now. It's so much easier to travel and it's less*

*glamorous and it's kind of you know, being on a plane is kind of annoying versus exciting. So, I was thinking a lot about that."*

Through the evaluation of differences and similarities between the past and now, consumers are able to create understanding for the context (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). In the Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, Virginia gained knowledge of the ways people travelled in the past that made her compare it to present and notice the differences between them. The desire to experience a luxury cruise or a flight made her want to live at that time when it was told to be accessible, resulting in the feelings of nostalgia. The history and feeling of nostalgia also connects the individuals to the society, as they understand of being part of the culture (Brown et al., 2003). Virginia is continuing the development of how people travel through consumption and that engages her to the past.

Through the exhibition and the feelings of nostalgia, visitors got a picture of times when life was more exciting (Brown et al., 2003; Holbrook, 1993), as Johann, 27-year-old student continues on Volez, Voguez, Voyagez:

Johann: *"I liked the ship because it looked like Titanic or something. Oh my god, I would have loved to live at that period. I also liked the beginning of the holidays going to Riviera with the cars and stuff... It's about 1925 and 1930's so... rich people. Still, I don't know if you Françoise Sagant. It's French literature and it makes me think about this period where people came out from the war, wanted to play, to enjoy life. So it made me think about that period. I think, as always, like today rich people are kind of lucky to enjoy this kind of new technology you know, and possibility to discover and be a bit avant-garde."*

The feeling of nostalgia is related to the profound thought of "things were better back then" that is due to the insecure nature of the postmodern culture (Brown et al., 2003; Goulding, 1999). In Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, Johann can travel in time to *la belle époque* and the times after World Wars that are often described as the happiest times in Europe by the history tales. One characteristic of these times are great scientific and technological innovations that Titanic also represented (Brown et al., 2013; Kozinets, 2008). As Johann said, rich people of those times and now are similar in a sense of being privileged to consume the breakthroughs that makes life more enjoyable. This also concerns Louis Vuitton products

that in the exhibitions were profiled as innovative trunks with the unbreakable locks. Therefore, at least for visitors like Johann, Louis Vuitton represents a pioneer in technology, bringing the happy times of *la belle époque* to be consumed in the 2000's.

Technology had a central role in both Louis Vuitton exhibitions and for many, it represented the future of the brand (Kozinets, 2008). However, the way it was placed in the exhibition spaces created a notion of a balance between the past and the future among the visitors. For example, Janina noticed how the historical logo and the legendary unbreakable locks were reborn through the use of technology in SERIES3:

Janina: *"I mentioned before how I love how they combine the technology with all the style of the brand. I think for example, the new logo, it's kind of that as well. They have just transformed it. Keeps this feeling that it is old but... new.*

*(...)*

*For example, one of the bags that is on the last room, you can take it. The way the bag is opened is the new logo. And then you turn the L and it converts into the V. When you open it."*

As Louis Vuitton launched their new logo in SERIES3, it was seen as big transformation towards the future style of the brand. The legendary LV-letters had a new outer appearance and technological features not seen before whilst it respected the heritage of Louis Vuitton with the representation of the unbreakable locks. This is also seen as a promise for new, modern Louis Vuitton, setting expectations to the future value propositions:

Anita: *"Seeing the old stuff is pretty cool but I liked the newer stuff, more the modern Louis Vuitton. Not so much the old school pattern and all that. I liked to see where it is going and it is going more modern."*

The new value proposition of Louis Vuitton embodies a promise to offer the life to enjoy for the consumers also in the future. Those, who are able to add symbolic resources of Louis Vuitton into their life projects are those people who are admired after centuries of time, being their own times avant-gardists. This way, Louis Vuitton uses its heritage as operant resource and technology as operand resource to create value for the future (Arnould et al., 2006). Also

the symbolic meanings what technology evokes in the visitors develops the value proposition further and creates a notion of life continuity (Kozinets, 2008). In addition, the meanings convert into understanding of the history as the stories of Louis Vuitton's life cycle are compared to the current way of living. This makes the consumable ideology of rebirth an essential part of using Louis Vuitton as a symbolic resource for personal renewal (Abrahams, 1981).

### *Context of personal capabilities*

In addition to getting knowledge in order to understand the contexts of life, consumers also visit the exhibitions to gain personal growth and inspiration (Falk et al., 1998). Visitors use the knowledge to develop their operant resources, for example skills and professional capabilities, and this strengthens their view of the self (Arnould et al., 2006). Almost every interviewee observed the exhibition from the professional point of view, even if they didn't work in creative or fashion-related industry. The exhibitions were seen mainly part of their creative process where the knowledge is rearranged in a way that it creates new meanings and feelings of surprise (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). Therefore, both SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez offered visitors symbolic resources that they built up their professional roles and life projects with (Arnould, 2005). For them, the aim was to use the knowledge of their own life as in mixing and matching ideas of Louis Vuitton to their own professional self, as Laura explained on what she looked for in exhibitions:

Laura: *"[Going to the SERIES3] is like going to the museum. Like, an art gallery, so... I think the more influence you can have in your artistic endeavor, the better."*

As mentioned earlier, Laura studies acting in London and sees the stimuli from exhibitions developing herself as an actress. In other words, Laura incorporates the value of creativity of the exhibitions to her life project (Arnould et al., 2006). By expanding and rearranging her knowledge, she creates broader network of associations that she can reminisce in her work when seeking for inspiration. The same was for Carol, who works as an actuary. She paid attention to knowledge that she could apply to her own, more analytic profession:

Carol: *“I found [the laser room] very interesting, because the tour guy just explained basically the process that [the cutting] is done automatically with the leather. That they check the leather automatically for imperfections and then they laser-cut the parts out of the leather so there’s an algorithm calculating the area and how to maximize the space that is used so there’s less waste, basically.*

*(...)*

*I have a background in mathematics and to develop such an algorithm to basically do it computer-based to optimize the space that is used on the leather, I find it really interesting. I never thought about that that could be an application on that.”*

Carol found it interesting to find such a different application of her own expertise, that she didn’t expect to find. This extended her perception of both her profession and the fashion industry. She clearly was pleased of the fact that the analytic side of the manufacturing process was honored and that her personal capabilities were part of the creative process of Nicolas Ghesquière. This makes the impression of being valued as a person by the subculture of her profession and thus, having valuable personal capabilities creates a feeling of comfort and belonging (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Thus, developing oneself professionally connects to contributing for the subculture and achieving acceptance. Therefore, many interviewees also told to share the knowledge gained in the exhibitions to other people. Jan, who was a psychology teacher, explained about her intentions to educate her students with the knowledge she got in SERIES3:

Jan: *“I would go to ask the fashion and textile department of my school whether they went and if they didn’t go tell them that they’re stupid idiots. I do think they’re a bit stupid if they didn’t come and bring their students here.*

*(...)*

*Because you know especially students, especially... I teach in the area that is not very high socioeconomic group, and they can never understand the why people have to charge so much even for something, let’s say for Topshop or then for Louis Vuitton. So it would give them some concept of the economics of it all. As well as the creative process.”*

Jan acknowledges that her students need the understanding of how the luxury industry works and what does it mean for them. At the same time, she wants to contribute to their creative

development, that is offering new meanings in a surprising way, that she doesn't feel like the textile department supports enough. This helps her to fulfil herself professionally and as a creative person while gaining acceptance from others (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Encouraging the students to visit SERIES3 is almost like a gift that will give them better understanding of the world, that they can exploit in the future.

Anita, who came to the SERIES3 with her daughter and husband, viewed the exhibition not from a professional perspective but as a mother. Instead of considering the exhibition as an art gallery or a museum that most of the interviewees did, she described it more as a playground for children:

*Anita: "There she could run around like she was on the catwalk. Which is great because it is so interactive! And it is lovely to children. There are surprisingly quite a few kids in here, you know. And it has been a real Saturday afternoon you know, for children coming and enjoying, which is lovely! It's a real family experience!"*

For Anita, the amusement of her daughter surpassed her need to focus on the exhibition. For her, visiting the exhibition was equal to offering something exceptional to her child and this way, expand her worldview. As a mother, Anita wants to give her daughter the access to valuable resources that she can create her life projects and roles of. While Anita facilitates the creation of her daughter's life project she also creates her own life role using her nurturing capabilities that gives her gratification. This way, the exhibition actually added on value to her life role as a mother (Arnould et al., 2006). Therefore, missing something because of her daughter is not something that she sees as a negative thing. The experience also strengthened the relationship between them as they interpreted the symbolic meanings together and this develops the way they can connect with each other (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In addition, the visit to the exhibition created Anita's view on what her family is like and what is her role as a part of that. For her, SERIES3 was mainly a family event that is highly social experience.

Apart from the more abstract context creation and development of personal life roles, the exhibitions also provided a channel to improve visitors' practical skills. As an example, Jan



listened the French Louis Vuitton artisans to speak, picking out words and sentences she recognizes:

Jan: *"I tried to understand the French because I try to resurrect my French.*

*(...)*

*[Jan's colleague] is someone I work with, she is French, so she speaks to me in French every day. Because she is helping me, she translates. And she said 'what you gonna do is to listen to the French music, watch French movies' so I'm going to tell her I tried listen to the French artisans speak.*

*(...)*

*That's actually a good practice because afterwards [the guide] is going to translate it so you can try to look that 'can I translate it before he does' because if you do miss it it's not a problem cause he is going to translate it anyway so it's an ideal situation."*

As a person who has travelled a lot and lived in many countries around the world, Jan sees the value in knowing another language. Also, knowing especially French is appreciated for it being a difficult language and official language in Europe. Once she picked up stories of the production process in French, she wasn't dependent on the translator's interpretation and thus, could make her own understanding on what the artisan was telling. In addition to the notion that the skill eases her communication with French people, learning the language is also about gaining appreciation from her colleague. Once she indicates that she is willing to learn, she also shows empathy for the foreigner like herself and respects her culture in a special way. Jan's personal experiences have shaped her perception of what personal capabilities are needed to settle in in a new society (Peñaloza, 1994) and she develops these skills with others like her, also in the SERIES3 exhibition.

Creating context of personal capabilities is actually a use of operant resources on cultural operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). By developing individual creative processes, visitors worked on their imagination and learning new skills that gave them understanding in what they are capable of doing and what needs to be improved. It seems that behind every capability, there is a certain life role it is linked to – whether it is an artist, a mother, professional or foreigner. This helps consumers to define themselves as relation to their

societies and subcultures and also express their membership to them (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

## 6.2 Consuming social connections

As the interpretation of value propositions always requires an interaction (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), social operant resources are employed in the consumption practices of consumers. Also, people can connect with a brand merely through other people, which emphasizes the importance of consumers' social relationships (Arnould et al., 2006). Also in SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, every interviewee revealed a central role of social networks in their life narratives. There was not only a large variety of social connections creating the experience but also different depths in these relationships. The strongest social communion can be found in the stories of family relationships. Many of the interviewees came to the exhibition with their close family member or in a way or another connected with them through the exhibition. An interesting finding was that when the experience was shared with close family or friends, the interviewees genuinely wanted to explain it in detail in order offer detailed representations of the experience and discuss later about it with them. In contrast, when sharing the experience with wider audience, e.g. through social media, the fundamental aim was to add the symbolic resources of the experience to build wider self-image.

### *Family*

Family relationships are considered as strong social ties that significantly influence consumer's consumption behavior (Arnould et al., 2006; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Carol came to the SERIES3 exhibition with her mother who was visiting her in London from Austria where she was originally from. Louis Vuitton as a brand had a very central role in their family since they owned several products which they shared with her mother:

*Carol: "I own basically, we own as a family, we own handbags, we own purses, shoes. I think some small jewelry. [Mom adds something in Austrian]. Cosmetics case, yes, a small cosmetics case. So that's probably considered luggage then. And I also own Louis Vuitton shares."*

Louis Vuitton was not only a link between Carol and her mother but also a connection to the older generations:

Carol's mother: *"It [her first Louis Vuitton bag] was a gift from my parents. I got the cosmetics suitcase and the speedy bag and porte monnaie and my father was really much exhausted because he said "I didn't even know that such expensive luggage I want" but it was a Christmas present and since then we are fans."*

Carol: *"And at that time I think they bought it on an island in the Caribbean on a cruise. So it was... on Saint Thomas... so it was a really exclusive... exclusive way at that time to buy Louis Vuitton."*

In Carol's and her mother's quotes, the Louis Vuitton products tie generations together creating a narrative of inheritance and family continuum (Cova, 1997). These products embody their family history and this is something that is highly cherished but also openly shared so that the family members can understand their origin (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Louis Vuitton opens Carol and her mother a window to their ancestors lives and to their important moments, such as travels in the Caribbean. Since the very first luggage Carol's mother owned was a souvenir from these travels, it also symbolizes the love they had towards her, measured in the effort they made to bring it to her (Levy, 1959; Price et al., 2000). This thought continues in the relationship between Carol and her mother where the Louis Vuitton products conveys love between them. In the same manner, the exhibition was a consumable experience (Ahola, 2005; Arnould and Price, 1993) that is something that they shared and that builds new elements in their relationship.

The exhibition as a connecting link between close family members strongly came up in other interviewees' stories as well. Rebecca came to the exhibition with her 14-year-old daughter who was described as a fashion enthusiast. Therefore, the primary reason for Rebecca to the visit was to tide her daughter over in achieving her dream to work as a fashion designer. This was also a way to gain understanding on the interest of her daughter and thus know better her life-world (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This required creating common symbolic meanings through the representations of fashion in the exhibition and in daughter's stories.

The connection between Rebecca and her daughter was strengthened through play when they immersed in different roles and situations proposed by the exhibition elements (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). In play, they could communicate on the given context without their natural polarization of power roles and this way find new levels in their relationship.

One of the most interesting findings was consumers' will to create connections with people who were not present in the exhibition and this phenomenon was significantly emphasized in cases where the loved one lived far away. Through consumption of Louis Vuitton exhibitions, visitors could ease off the longing for that person (Belk et al., 2003). In this sense, exhibitions involved symbolic resources that encouraged visitors to create representations of the experience when interacting with close family members. Jan, who was a South African in her 50's, had been living in London for the past 12 years. As mentioned, she was a psychology teacher in a high school whereas her sisters have chosen a more creative paths:

*Jan: "I'm really art-driven, I go to as many exhibitions as I can. [This is] because I'm interested in fashion. My sister is a fashion designer and my other sister is an interior designer and I've should have done something arty but didn't. So I try to go to as many exhibitions as possible to see what the trends are there."*

Going to the exhibitions is a way for Jan to stay in a same mindset as her sisters and enabling them to discuss the area they all have knowledge of (Garro, 2000; Romney et al., 1986). In Jan's quote, she slightly disassociates herself from her siblings, as in being the black sheep in the family when choosing more academic career. Jan also acknowledges that the ability of being creative must run in their blood and she has to exploit and develop that skill in other ways than her sisters. This emphasizes her need to create meanings that they can share as a family so that they can maintain common cultural consensus and worldviews (Ridley et al., 1994).

Studying or working in the creative industry was also a common thing for the family of Laura, aged 22. She was originally from Peru and studying acting in London after living couple of years in the US. Her mother works as an interior designer in Sweden and she described her father as a businessman who is creative in his own field. However, in her story

Laura focused on the relationship between her and her siblings. Laura considered fashion and art as a common interest between her and her sisters and she came to the exhibition because of the habit of what she used to have with them:

*Laura: “I love fashion because it is art as well. Like, I love everything in art, like sculptures, and paintings. I went to the Frieze [art gallery in London], I’ve been to Spark, like contemporary art exhibition which is really really cool. Yes. And then, I have two younger sisters and together we have always been really interested in fashion. More of because it is an expression of who you are as well. And kind of the idea of playing with no rules or boundaries or really you know, being able to show what you are and who you are. So, I’d say that, yeah, it is more like a family affair now that way. Like, wherever we go to meet we always go to art galleries and we also see, well, like observe what people are, the style of people. My middle sister, like the little sister, she is a photographer as well. So... and she lives in New York, so she is always going to fashion shows and photographing people and stuff like that.”*

For Laura, the visit to the exhibition replicated a meeting with her sisters. As art and fashion had always played a central role in their lives, they had the habit of connecting through exhibitions and thus, they developed their relationship in this context. In a way, Laura and her family create a subculture that place special emphasis on consuming exhibitions that create common lived experiences and understanding (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). In her story, Laura also revealed their secret ways of behaving in the exhibitions that are certain kind of rituals or symbol of the unity for them (Peñaloza, 1994). By observing people and how they dress they could evaluate strangers against themselves and open a discussion for what they resonate with. When living far from her family Laura has upheld these ways of behaving even when visiting the exhibition alone:

*Laura: “There was this guy, I remember this, he taking a lot of pictures but not really making eye contact with anyone so it’s kind of like, looking down on the floor. So it’s like really interesting. That he was taking up space, because he was quite a big man and taking pictures but also like, not wanting to be seen.”*

In addition to upholding rituals which creates associations to the previous exhibitions shared with her sisters, Laura also wanted to experience the SERIES3 exhibition *for them*. Laura took several photos mainly to be sent to her sister so that she could understand Laura's lived experience better. By sharing her experience, Laura also extended the conception her sister has of her life in London. Using her family ties as social operant resource, the exhibition is made from Laura's private experience into something that her sister can analyze on and develop her thinking with, making it a point of reference in their relationship.

Close family members tend to share variety of knowledge and networks of meanings with each other due to the similar cultural backgrounds (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The findings indicate that the similarities in cultural background and prior experiences determine the depth of their relationship that is enforced through shared experiences. To maintain the connection, family members participate in same lived experiences and negotiate on new meanings through verbal or visual representations. Also, when the exhibition is interpreted merely through the narratives of others, such as through images or stories, they act as a link to the lived experience (Arnould et al., 2006; Arnould and Price, 2000). Close family members trust each other which makes their representations reliable sources of symbolic meanings. In other words, consuming Louis Vuitton exhibition was a mean to tie family members closer together and redevelop their roles in others' lives.

### *Social media audiences*

The visual and verbal representations of the exhibitions were also central in for those visitors who created connections with friends and circle of acquaintances through social media. The framing of the experience differed significantly when the it was described to a close family member compared to when it shared to a wider audience through social media. Therefore, it was evident that social media channels, such as Snapchat, was a mean to spread one's knowledge of the common interest of a group (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) and a way to create one's life projects and roles in a form of visual and verbal narrative (Phillips et al., 2014). The strategy of associating the exhibition and its' meanings to the self emerged in the way Harleen, aged 17, spoke about the reaction of her friends to her photos on SERIES3:

Harleen: *Well, a lot my friends on Snapchat have popped up and said it looks amazing. Some could not make it because they're at work but when I was sending them pictures they were just like 'wow, it looks amazing!'. A lot of people popped up and said 'wow, is that how they make the bags'. And it's just literally... when you see it face to face like we did."*

The social media channels, such as Snapchat, give control of the representation to the sender, as if its users were giving out value propositions to the audience (Arnould et al., 2006). The meanings in the exhibition are reproduced when Harleen frames her story of the experience either consciously or unconsciously, focusing on sending on value propositions that she wants to be associated with. When Harleen claimed to convey her experience as lived, she actually encoded herself to the representations that the audience interprets with their personal resources (Arnould et al., 2006). This way, Harleen created her life story through social media. Although the given information is more or less limited, the visitors create also their own experiences through the use of social media and continue the negotiation of meanings there (Phillips et al., 2014). Also Laura used Snapchat to frame her life in London, especially for her friends and acquaintances who lived back in Peru:

Laura: *"I think it's really funny in terms of... for Snapchat in general because when I went back to Peru in summer there's this girl who is friends with my friend, and she's like 'oh my god! I know all like, all like London life, through like all your Snapchats' and I'm like... I... yeah, and sometimes I get like, Snapchat as like 'oh shit people actually do see my life' and so it's kind of... it's really funny."*

Laura's story reveals how she has been framing her whole life in London to a wider audience through social media. In this setting, the exhibitions become a consumable object which symbols fit well in Laura's life project as a creative person (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Levy, 1959). The social media is also a channel for her audience to consume the experiences and create meanings for their own life-worlds. Therefore, Laura actually becomes an important operant resource for them as consumers can be engaged to the experiences through their links to other people (Arnould et al., 2006). At the same time, Laura connects to her society in Peru through sharing knowledge as visual and verbal representations.

Other consumers in the marketplace bring significant value to the life experience as communities entail consumer agency, valuable information and behavioral models for socialization (Arnould et al., 2006; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Therefore, also the relationships consumers made with the other visitors in SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez influenced the overall experience. Even though other visitors were mainly on the background of the experience, their presence played an important role in the deployment of social operant resources. As discussed earlier, for Laura, the exhibition was a place to observe other people out of habit and to develop her creative process as an actress. The observation ritual was important to her because it was something she connected with her sister with but also, because she learned from other visitors' behavior. Jan, on the other hand, connected with another visitor in a situation where they both sought for compassion:

*Jan: "Then quite funny, when we came out of there, there comes a mirror and I thought "how do I get out of here?". So I'm making an idiot of myself, "I'll wait to someone else to go!" and then it was someone else to go and would bang into the mirror. She said "I hope it wasn't that bad, I didn't realize it was a mirror." And then she said "Oh my, I feel such an idiot I didn't know where I was going" and I said "Actually don't feel so bad, I was waiting for someone to leave so I could find way to go" and then, umm, you come at like black wall, before actually having to go around and it's not quite clear."*

Experiencing the same incident Jan and the other visitor could connect in a special way without knowing each other beforehand. In SERIES3 where the space was limited and directions were more or less given, this kind of unexpected encounter was possible. The connecting value of these kind of unusual events is based on the intensity of new emotions (Arnould and Price, 1993). When Jan noticed another visitor acting the same way she could relate to her and imagine how she felt. This connection helped her to explain the recent incident, telling apart what was caused by the situation and what she caused herself. Jan also purposely stayed in the passage to wait someone to come in order to get support from the others in this new environment. In a sense, Jan used her social operant resources to adopt behavioral models from others and thus, resonate with the other visitors of the exhibition.



The presence of consumer communities was acknowledged by the visitors already before entering the exhibitions. Most of the interviewees had created expectations of how the other visitors are going to be like and categorized them based on their schemas and prior experiences. Therefore, consumer communities around Louis Vuitton exhibitions were imagined, based only on expectations of others (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). One common illusion of a community member that repeated in almost every story was that the visitor must be interested in luxury and fashion at some level, either through consumption, studies or out of curiosity. This created a separation between fashion "insiders" and "normal people" that against many interviewees mirrored the audience and themselves:

Carol: *"I would generally say that people that come here are generally interested in fashion. And I would say, most of them would also be Louis Vuitton customers or potential Louis Vuitton customers. I would say they also spend quite a lot of money on fashion by the handbags they wear or the shoes they wear, of course there is a lot of branded handbags, expensive handbags. I would say there was some that you can really tell they're fashion enthusiasts and normal people like us."*

In Carol's quote, she describes her image of a luxury fashion consumer that she differentiates herself with. From her perspective, fashion insiders are ready to invest large amounts of money in the products and thus, to their outer appearance. Identification of different consumer communities requires categorization whereby visitors make sense of their membership to those communities (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Own belonging is defined based on the similarities and differences one shares with the other community members (Arnould and Price, 2000; Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). As Carol defined herself as part of the "normal people", she meant that she doesn't feel the need to consume fashion as conspicuously as the imagined brand community of Louis Vuitton. In contradiction with Carol's view, Harleen clearly wanted to group herself with fashion enthusiasts. She had decided to dress based on her expectations and first felt overdressed outside the exhibition. Therefore, in the exhibition she ended up seeking for support from people who had put more effort into their outfit:

Harleen: *"I guess I saw, what I was saying to [my friend] is, when I came in heels I thought I was a bit overdressed. And I thought 'no one is going to wear heels'. And then when I*

*actually like came and I saw everybody else, you kind of feel comfortable because how you dress and it's about how you want to portray yourself in the exhibition like this. That was the main thing. So you just kind of feel comfortable also when you see how other people are dressed."*

Harleen expressed her belonging to the fashion insiders by the way she dressed to the exhibition, consciously adding more similarity features with the community members (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In her words, she wanted to portray herself as stylish, confident woman while not wanting to separate herself too much from the others. Through the way of dressing Harleen carried out community's normative pressures and representation of it to outsiders (Algesheimer et al., 2005). The contrast between the style of people on the streets of London and the visitors in SERIES3 made Harleen feel confused of what dressing rules to follow but that changed into relief when she got reference points from other visitors. Interacting with community members results in consensual validation between community members (Algesheimer et al., 2005) and thus, Harleen gaining acceptance from others.

Another clear distinction was made between the visitors and the staff members. There was an interesting tension between two categorizations of the staff roles: one was them keeping watch on the visitors and on the other hand, staff was seen as welcoming and guiding them. Mostly, these roles were existing simultaneously. Kasia interpreted the meaning of the staff by the way they dressed:

*Kasia: "Why they are wearing black? Well, I have a quite long history of working for theatre and there they wore black because basically everything was dark and they weren't supposed to be visible. I think in this case, if they wear black everyone notices them, they are quite different to everyone else. Everyone will have some sort of color. Plain black is quite organic look, I guess."*

Across different cultures, black color is considered as symbol that entails meanings of power and wealth (Madden et al., 2000). Therefore, the black color as Louis Vuitton's operand resource invoked meanings in the visitors that uncover the power roles between the staff and the visitor. In the quote of IN3, the staff is considered as supervising entity who has authority on the valuable products and on visitors' behavior. Due to the contrast in the ways the staff

and visitors dress, authority is brought visible which influences how the exhibition is looked upon. In the SERIES3, the visitors started to carry out behavior that respected this authority, such as not touching certain products, which enforced the exclusiveness of Louis Vuitton. This means that with a use of black suits Louis Vuitton stirred meanings that change social settings and polarization of power that is transferred to the value proposition through the social behavior of the visitors.

In contradiction with the authoritative position of the staff, most of the interviewees considered Louis Vuitton employees as highly approachable and welcoming that also Chloé noticed when visiting the Volez, Voguez, Voyagez exhibition:

Chloé: *“There was one person in one room. Like people who were like in the entrance of the room. They told you that if you have any questions, if you need a personal visit in the room, they can show you so... in every room there was someone you could ask for more information or for tour or something.”*

In Chloé’s story, the staff members were considered as someone to be looked up to for being so welcoming and respectful towards every visitor. Also how the staff members were located in the room formed their role to be easily approachable which encouraged visitors to build social relations to them. By attending to joint activities facilitated by the staff members, such as guided tours, visitors were able to engage to the experience and enforce the community (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Through this behavior, visitors created an imagined brand community for Louis Vuitton, that they had a role in (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), as Laura continues on SERIES3:

Laura: *“Yeah, it’s kind of like, you feel like the brand really cares for, for you. Like the general public. Putting all this effort. You know, and inviting everyone, ‘come to see, come to be part of the brand, come to be part of what makes Louis Vuitton Louis Vuitton’. So I think it’s really memorable. That the brand goes such far, so far that just bring everyone in.”*

In order to engage with the community, consumers have to identify themselves as part of it (Algesheimer et al., 2005). In Laura’s narrative, she recognized that Louis Vuitton is much

more than the luxury products: it is all about the society around it where all the visitors also belong. This balanced the contradictive view of brand exclusiveness and engages also consumers like Laura to the experience. This was possible through the creation of social ties with other imagined community members and Louis Vuitton staff members through shared rituals, focus of interest and emotions (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The exhibitions offer a platform for creating such relationships that employ social operant resources. This results in shared activities and meanings and thus, creating, enforcing and reproducing the subculture (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

### *Ethnic*

One of the consumers' social operant resources is nationality and all the cultural knowledge linked to the ethnic identity (Arnould et al., 2006). Therefore, the visitors of Louis Vuitton exhibitions connected socially also on the national level, mirroring their experience on their cultural background (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This came out especially in the stories of French visitors, who considered Louis Vuitton as their national treasure and therefore, as a connecting thing to all French people. This supports the finding of Louis Vuitton being a central symbol for French culture as a luxury fashion brand. Therefore, it seemed like a national responsibility to gain more knowledge on Louis Vuitton and share it to the foreigners, as Alix, 21-year-old Parisian told:

*Alix: "That was the thing too, I went out of the exhibition and I thought 'well, now I know more about the one of the most famous French brands' and that's a good thing because, if you meet like foreign people and they would tell you about the brand, I would kind of feel bad to know nothing about it. I know it's kind of our patrimony as French people so it's important to know at least a small part of it. And now when I have been to this exhibition I feel like I can talk about Louis Vuitton. I feel like proud that this brand is French."*

Cultural background has significant influence on consumers' interpretation process as it entails a complex network of different values, norms and behavioral patterns (Peñaloza, 2001). For Alix, knowing Louis Vuitton and its history was a proof of her French background and expression of her personal values. French nationality also creates an imagined community that can be accessed through the symbolic resources like Louis Vuitton.

Therefore, Alix found it inconvenient if a foreigner can use Louis Vuitton as a source of meanings more efficiently than her. As consuming the context also recreates the culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), a person that is considered as an outsider of the imagined subculture shouldn't have the rights to do so. These tensions are balanced in the exhibitions where the French consumers can build up on their ethnic community and thus, their culture with unique cultural and social operant resources.

### 6.3 Consuming freedom

Individualism and freedom are values central to the postmodern culture and having a possibility to choose who you are is built deep in the structures of Western societies (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Peñaloza, 2001). Also the Louis Vuitton exhibitions set a stage for consuming symbolic resources of freedom and implementing behavioral models supporting it. Two main findings concerning this context are that visitors were able to detach themselves from their personal restrictions that increased the feeling of freedom (Celsi et al., 1993). Also, prevalent nature of the exhibition was it being immersive, so that they offered immediate process to access to the experience, that allowed visitors to adopt new life roles and identities (Carù and Cova, 2006). Being free of personal resources, life roles and environment is necessary for consumers in creating their dream realities and utopian worlds, that is discussed after.

#### *Being free of personal resources*

Offering the exhibitions for free communicated strongly to the audience that everyone is welcome regardless on their personal resources and thus, the visitors came from very different backgrounds. In contrast to Louis Vuitton's other brandscapes, i.e. their stores or boutiques, they didn't expect the visitors to have monetary resources nor intentions to become a customer in the near future. Also, the channels where the exhibition was advertised on played a role in communicating what kind of audience they wanted to have. For example, Laura spotted an advertisement on a metro and Jan read on the exhibition from a tabloid. This also let the visitors to "come as they are" although some interviewees felt the pressure to dress up and that way show their knowledge on the area of fashion and commitment to specific subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). However, Louis Vuitton set up a

value proposition of acceptance and therefore, the two exhibitions were seen as a gift for the society, as Anita describes:

Anita: *"I'm so grateful for Louis Vuitton that it is free to people, so you know, to give back something, almost if they're made all this money and now giving some back to their customers who are ready just enjoy fashion."*

For Anita, the free exhibition was a humane gesture to give customers something extra for their investment as in increasing the value of their purchases. This can be considered as the 'linking value' of the Louis Vuitton (Cova, 1997). Even though majority of the visitors were not previous customers of Louis Vuitton like Anita, they were treated as ones that occurred mainly in the welcoming behavior of the employees. It liberated visitors of their own socioeconomic status as they weren't valued by their monetary resources but for their interest towards the exhibition. For a moment, the exclusiveness of luxury was removed and they could experience something that hasn't been accessible for them before. This way, by removing the social barriers related to luxury consumption, Louis Vuitton created a value proposition of a more desirable and humane brand and most importantly, of a membership in the brand community (Schau et al., 2009).

In addition to monetary resources, time can be considered as a personal resource as people have certain control over where to spend it to (Feldman and Hornik, 1981). However, in a fast-paced and scheduled world free time has high value for people and therefore, they want to invest it well. Harleen described how liberating it was to visit the SERIES3 where she hadn't put any time limit for the experience:

Harleen: *"No one was barging or anything. It was just so like, you could just take your time, there was no rush. So it wasn't like 'hey, we got to do this within this amount of time'. You could just really like, take your pictures, pictures of yourself. And it was just like, I think it was just how exhibition should always be."*

Harleen emphasized how time is perceived as a university student. For her, time was a restrictive factor and the lack of it invoked negative feelings. Therefore, Harleen found it pleasant to not have the temporal pressure. When consumers are able to disengage them from

the limits of time they can really concentrate on the stimuli, interpret the symbolic resources and process the knowledge they receive. At the exhibitions, people really took the advantage of all the time they were given, as Anita described:

Anita: *“The thing I liked the most was the catwalk with all the digital images and the freedom to like, just sit there and look at it for ages and really absorb it. And the music, the whole atmosphere inspired and made you feel insouciant, really special. So that was great.”*

In the Louis Vuitton exhibitions, visitors exploited the surroundings to divide their time there as they wanted. Harleen enjoyed taking pictures that usually is forbidden in exhibitions and museums and Anita took the advantage of the seating and enjoyed the moment of not going anywhere. As she said, this made her feel insouciant, detaching herself from the unpleasant things in her life. The exhibitions turned out to offer extraordinary experiences for the visitors, where they can process meaningful value propositions as long as they wanted (Arnould et al., 2006) and detach themselves from their economic limitations (Arnould, 2005). This facilitated behaving differently than usual and thus, adopting new life roles (Carù and Cova, 2006). As a conclusion, visitors of Louis Vuitton exhibitions were freed from their institutional and social structures that otherwise limit their consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

### *Immersion*

The both exhibitions held up a strong feeling of immersion that helped visitors to lose a sense of time and personal restrictions (Carù and Cova, 2006). In the state of immersion, visitors could feel like becoming as one with the surrounding elements and that the distance between the situation and the visitor was diminished. At the exhibitions, this meant that the atmosphere was perceived so captivating that the visitors could pay their attention to that moment and “forget about the reality”. This emphasized the extraordinary nature of the exhibitions and variety of intense emotions that it invoked (Arnould and Price, 1993). In today’s fast-paced world where people are receiving distracting stimuli from various sources around them, the feeling of immersion is rare and highly valued (Celsi et al., 1993). Therefore, almost every interviewee described immersion in their stories with a positive tone in a way or another and distraction of it evoked negative emotions. For example, in her quote

Jonathan, a design student from Taiwan, describes how the design of the exhibition space of SERIES3 influenced her experience:

Jonathan: *"I love the design of the place.*

*(...)*

*Because it's lively. You can see like, everything is moving. So you get closer to the brand. Actually like, you feel like you are actually the brand. It is quite close."*

In an environment where the laws of physics are questioned by creating abstract visual stimuli, visitors could distance them from the reality and feel their "true" selves (Abrahams, 1981). The feeling of becoming one with the brand as Jonathan experienced, liberated visitors also from who they are as humans and individuals that allows them to live different roles or enforce their fragmented identities (Carù and Cova, 2006). In this state of mind, the story of Louis Vuitton can be seen as personal development that creates unexceptional engagement to the experience and thus, to Louis Vuitton (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In the Louis Vuitton exhibitions, the feeling of immersion had a significant influence also on how people behaved. Rieya noticed that she carried out different behavior compared to how she usually observed people in the exhibitions:

Rieya: *"This was quite fast-paced and interactive, well not interactive but there was a lot going on. And nothing was still. So you won't really notice anyone around you. It's quite surprising because usually we people watch all the time. Like, that's the best thing about London. But for some reason, it was just like a thing to avoid. Normally we're always like, "oh, look at her shoes". But wouldn't do that today."*

Rieya felt that the elements in the exhibition prevented her to observe people around her and actually, she started to behave on the contrary to her and her friend's normal behavior. As she told, instead of focusing on what other people wear they consciously avoided being distracted by others. As the feeling of immersion was something to cherish, distraction came up as a negative experience in the stories of other interviewees as well. Any communication that was not related to the exhibition takes the visitor away from the moment and restricted freedom to own choice. Also, the immersion was emphasized when other people around



were behaving the same way, in contradiction of how they would normally do as Natalie noticed:

Natalie: *"People were so quiet; they were looking at things. Actually, I noticed that no one was looking at their phones or anything, they were really, you know, concentrating what they were seeing. So it was nice to see."*

Even though taking photos and getting extra content through mobile app was highly encouraged by the staff, there were parts where focusing on the phone was found distracting. As phone is a channel to others, sometimes even more immersive realities, using it in the exhibition is considered as a waste of time. This is due to the conception of the value the exhibition creates to visitors: focusing on the moment is seen more valuable for own life than capturing a representation of it (Celsi et al., 1993). On the other hand, at some parts visitors felt a need for taking photos as a token that they can come back to when the experience is over. Like for Jan, someone precluding her from taking photos was also considered as negative influence on her experience:

Jan: *"Some people were quite selfish and other people were really great. You know some people were sort of, you standing, clearly trying to take a photo and they come to stand directly in front of you and they're tall and big and I'm small."*

By blocking the view to the stimuli, other visitors prevented Jan to get immersed and reduced her power to fulfil the experience and this evoked frustration and anger in her. Due to her small size, Jan is easily thwarted to use her resources to access the experience that in the end consisted of short moments of immersion instead of a long, consistent flow experience (Carù and Cova, 2006). In a sense, the freedom of taking in all the possible symbolic resources is part of the exhibition's value proposition and if these expectations are not met, it leads to dissatisfaction and sense of losing control of the experience.

According to the interview descriptions on immersion, Louis Vuitton exhibitions shared features and behavioral models with sacred spaces enhancing spirituality of a visitor (Davies and Freathy, 2014). The exhibitions as public spaces entail certain rules including quieting down in own thoughts, throwing yourself in the moment and respecting other visitors'

experiences. Following this thought, the focus of the visitors' experience is on processing the meanings in life and through the feeling of immersion, visitors can access to surroundings that offer completely new meanings compared to the everyday life. Immersive experiences have been thought as authenticating acts an access to the 'true self' that motivates people to attend and aim at such experiences (Abrahams, 1981; Tumbat and Belk, 2011). Indeed, the findings on Louis Vuitton exhibitions indicate that diminishing the distance between oneself and the reality activates visitor's imagination that again, is used as a resource for creating the dream self and alternative utopian worlds.

## 6.4 Consuming utopia

The freedom of personal resources and the feeling of immersion open up a new ways of interpreting symbolic resources in the marketplace (Carù and Cova, 2006) that with consumers create alternative realities and life roles (Abrahams, 1981; Celsi et al., 1993). To activate visitors' imagination, the Louis Vuitton exhibitions included physical stimuli that was converted into various emotions in the meaning-making process of the consumers (Arnould and Price, 1993). This created an illusion of a new environment that differed significantly of the reality and made the visitors question their inner selves. Also, the dreams illustrating the consumption of Louis Vuitton products was found to be future-oriented in "what if" kind of tone. The utopian worlds that were created in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions revealed valuable activities of trying on new possible selves and drawing meanings from them to be included to the final life projects and identities.

### *Charm of novelty*

One way of making a difference between the everyday life and extraordinary experience is to feel something that you wouldn't normally do in your everyday life (Arnould and Price, 1993). SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyage invoked strong emotions in the interviewees even though these feelings were often too abstract to describe. One dominant emotion however, was surprise, arising from the differences between set expectations and the experience itself (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). The feeling of surprise upheld the charm of novelty throughout the exhibitions and this way, contributed into the creation of utopian world. Many visitors were surprised how the two exhibitions shook their view on how

exhibitions are and how art and fashion are usually presented, as Alix and Chloé discussed together on their expectations on Volez, Voguez, Voyagez:

Alix: *“I was expecting more like a modern, not a modern, but an exhibition with recent like, bags and recent collections of Louis Vuitton. I didn’t think it was like, back to like, very beginning of Louis Vuitton. So that was a surprise for me.”*

Chloé: *“I also expected it to be more like a museum. Like you see all the bags, all the models and you kind of see what’s the name of it, when it was created. And it was much more than that actually.”*

As discussed earlier, the expectations towards the Louis Vuitton exhibitions were based on prior understanding on museums and fashion. New meanings on these context are created through the process of schema discrepancy that is the source of feeling of the unexpected (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). As the discussion of Alix and Chloé’s indicate, their expectations were exceeded in Volez, Voguez, Voyagez and the overall feeling of surprise continued throughout the exhibitions, due to the unexpected elements what visitors were exposed to, as Laura continues on her experience in SERIES3:

Laura: *“It is like an art gallery. Because the way each room is made, like, the sound and the texture, on the floor. You know, like there is a rug sometimes. Like there is the black room with the laser in it, like you couldn’t see the floor really and then you have these, like, other rooms with screens and changing things and people making the purses. So I think each room has a world of its own.”*

The small elements of SERIES3, such as music or texture of the floor, upheld the feeling of surprise for Laura. In the both exhibitions, the visitors were conditioned to see and feel something new as they moved further and they built up their expectations also during the exhibition based on the observations in previous rooms. Both exhibitions played with variety of different themes, sounds, colors, smells and textures causing strong physical stimuli in visitors and further, triggering different emotions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). As Laura describes in her quote, challenging visitors with different physical stimuli evoked new associations which stirred curiosity and enhances focus on the exhibition. If the deep focus

could be maintained, it turned into the feeling of immersion. This means that visitors were able to recall different cultural operant resources and make different associations in each room making the experience to symbolize personal renewal (Abrahams, 1981).

### *Adopting new roles*

One way of detaching from the reality is changing the way people think about themselves and who they are. As described earlier, people carry out and develop certain life roles in their lives i.e. as professional, as a mother or a citizen of their home country (Kleine et al., 2000). In order to detach from their ordinary behavioral models, people adopt new roles that for Louis Vuitton exhibitions provided a perfect environment. As people were already freed from their personal traits, they could be easily replaced by play and imagination in the setting where Louis Vuitton offered the staging. For its enjoyable nature, play in consumption increases the positive emotions and well-being of the visitor (Holbrook et al., 1984). Therefore, also the value propositions in SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez that encouraged visitors to play with different identities created excitement and the dream self.

The scenery of SERIES3 was ideal for adopting a role of a “fashion insider” as it provided a lot of cues to the behavior of models, fashion editors and designers. For some, carrying out atypical rituals started already at home when choosing an outfit in which to appear in the exhibition. Like at official fashion weeks, a flamboyant arrival to the shows also creates what fashion is. Current fashion raises inspiration from streetwear and by making an appearance at fashion-related events people feel like they are influencing the industry. At fashion shows, the influencers are reviewing the collections and deciding which will live as a trend next season (Simmel, 1957). Because of this, they have a huge power of what is in and what’s not, and therefore, also as adopting that role of a fashion insider, visitors at SERIES3 felt like they are important:

Harleen: *“There was music on the fashion one, with the catwalk. The one that we really liked. And it was just really good it kind of got you in the mood and just made you feel like you were there. Because it was so like a catwalk music. You know, tune that people play. So it just made you feel like you were actually in there as an audience watching a live catwalk show.”*

As Harleen describes, on room of SERIES3 embodied meanings of a catwalk. Based on her understanding of the behavioral models around this context Harleen adopted a role of an audience and observed the surroundings as if in the fashion show. As SERIES3 provided a great scenery for observing, it also evoked cues to the role of a fashion model, as Jonathan experienced:

Jonathan: *“[My favorite thing that I saw was the runway]. Because it feels like you are just walking on it. And then you are like model, actually [laughs]. I stayed there for like maybe 20 minutes. Taking selfies [laughs]. Because I’ve never been to like, runway like that. So, I think it’s very fresh to me.”*

Models represent the beauty standards of Western culture and therefore, consumers like to adopt behavioral models of them to be included to their dream selves. In a sense, meanings in beauty standards flow from the elite to the mainstream (McCracken, 1986). Therefore, visitors adopted the behavior of models as a lifestyle. As an example, Jenina, 24-year-old marketing event assistant from London, found a way to immerse herself into the lifestyle of the models at the restaurant of the SERIES3 exhibition:

Jenina: *“It is so nice, we had some salads from the bar and we thought like the menu that they had there is like really fashion world kind of menu. So it’s quite nice like with small salads, small portions, kale, it is so fashion kind of thing! So it was delicious and the view is perfect and it’s a really nice idea to finish it out like this, I think.”*

Having small portion salads at the end of the exhibition is practicing consumption behavior of the “fashion insider” role that has been adopted. It is a way to get closer to the lives of the models but also represents being forerunner in every aspect of life as well. The exhibition provided a safe environment to try also very radical behavior changes through play and imagination (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holt, 2003), because the visitors were surrounded by people who accept it. If this behavior was transferred into the normal life of Jenina, she might be judged by her society. In addition to the activities of play, the trend foods or drinks might act as a tokens that people can build into their own lifestyle and this way engage them into the fashion industry and Louis Vuitton (Kozinets et al., 2004). This

way, the meanings in the dream worlds are transferred into the everyday life of the visitor through consumption.

Apart from the buying behavior that Jenina practiced, visitors also replicated the behavior of real Louis Vuitton customers in a representation of a show room. Whereas in their normal lives it was difficult to get in touch with the products, at the end of the both exhibitions visitors were allowed to play with the clothes as in the Louis Vuitton stores:

Jonathan: *“I touched almost everything! Because in normal life, it is quite hard to touch those things. Actually. Because, they’re quite expensive and it’s quite rare. They are rare to see. And because I love like, different kind of materials. I mean, like textures and patterns so, I loved to touch it and experience what’s the difference between them.”*

At the end of SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, the outcome of the creative process of Nicolas Ghesquière was presented in a form of the collection, set in a scenery that visitors interpreted as a clothing store. As Jonathan tells in her quote, this was the point when visitors could adopt a role of a real Louis Vuitton customer and incorporate the pieces in their own taste and style. By dreaming of owning Louis Vuitton products visitors could also play with the idea of being free of their own restricting resources (Phillips et al., 2014). In addition, in the previous rooms consumers had produced different value propositions for Louis Vuitton and in the replication of Louis Vuitton store people were able to encode these meanings to the physical products. Then, when visitors adopted a role of a LV customer through play, they were able to incorporate the products that is, the value propositions, to their dream realities and roles.

#### *Future-oriented consumption*

As mentioned, most of the interviewees were not customers of Louis Vuitton nor considered themselves as potential ones in the near future. Also those few who owned products saw them as unique pieces, received as gifts from close family or friends. Therefore, Louis Vuitton successfully held cultural meanings of hedonic consumption and luxury (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). This way the Louis Vuitton exhibitions seduced visitors to think about the brand as part of their dream lives, setting consumption intentions to the future

(Phillips et al., 2014). Jan, who didn't think that she realistically would never buy Louis Vuitton, experienced engagement to the brand in SERIES3:

Jan: *"[The exhibition] just installs a passion. You know, 'Oh, maybe I should buy Louis Vuitton bag, that's six months' salary but never mind!'*

*(...)*

*Then I think like 'calm down!'"*

The way Jan described her passion towards Louis Vuitton illustrates how visitors started to incorporate the Louis Vuitton in her real lives. By practicing "what if" – thinking, visitors like Jan calculated their economic resources and estimated the value of the desired product for them (Holbrook, 1999). In a case of Jan, she quickly realized how bizarre thoughts she had had on realizing her dreams. Also those visitors who already owned Louis Vuitton practiced dreaming of products they still didn't have, as Carol told:

Carol: *"I would like to own a trunk. Maybe not [as] my next investment but [as] a big investment. I would love to have a trunk that I don't use as a luggage piece but more as a decorated piece in the apartment. And as a storage piece as well."*

Carol visualized the Louis Vuitton trunk in the settings of her real life and this way she played with alternative futures that includes consuming Louis Vuitton (Phillips et al., 2014). By dreaming of Louis Vuitton products, consumers evaluate the gains of actually owning them (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) that most likely, are social (Levy, 1959). In other words, consumers are able to decide if Louis Vuitton products add value to their personal life projects, whether it is representing higher social status or being a fashion "insider". If so, Louis Vuitton products become a cultural artifact for a better life that is, access to the utopian world.

## 7. Discussion

In the following section I will further discuss on my findings on value creation in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions and I aim at elaborating the question of how value is perceived by the visitors. Based on the identified value co-creation activities I further develop the processes of value creation and through this I form a model for the life-world of a consumer. I present all the levels in which the value is located and finally, I demonstrate how brands get access to consumers' life projects and roles.

In the previous chapter consumers' creation of life projects was interpreted through the stories of the lived experiences in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions. Four different activities in which life projects are constructed were identified: consuming contexts, social relationships, freedom and utopian world. The findings support the view that consumers engage to these four activities to realize their life projects and roles that is the fundamental goal of a consumer (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Therefore, the value of the lived experience depends on how well consumers can exploit their resources in the activities of value co-creation to contribute their current life projects at hand.

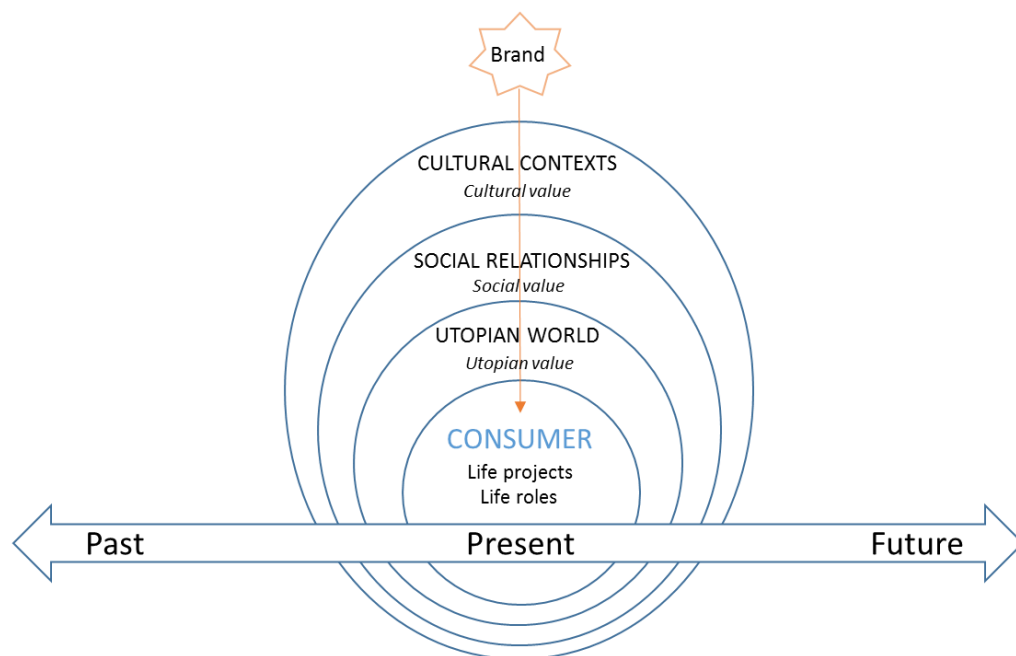


Figure 7: Consumer's life-world



The life projects and roles and patterns of experiences are coded within the life-worlds of the consumers who actively seek for value by deploying their operand and operant resources (Arnould et al., 2006). The figure 6 embodies the life-world of a consumer and its different levels where the operand resources and the value is located. In the center of the figure is the consumer and its multiple life projects and roles that are surrounded by consumers' worldview on cultural contexts, personal social relationships and subjective dreams, named as utopian world. In the Louis Vuitton exhibitions, the value was found to be located in these three dominant layers of the consumer life-world. By using their operand and operant resources on firm-provided value propositions of the brand, the meanings created in this interaction circulate within these three layers. However, the new meanings are welcomed to the life projects and roles of a consumer only if they are able to contribute to them (Arnould et al., 2006). In other words, only those meanings that with a consumer can narrate his or her life project are considered as valuable.

Even though the findings support the previous research on that the notion of value is highly subjective (Holbrook, 1999), some categorization of the perceived value has been made in this research. The findings suggest that consumers store cultural, social and utopian value embedded in their operand and operant resources that are located within cultural contexts, social relationships and utopian worlds, as the figure 6 shows. To create these three types of values, consumers have to enter service encounters where all of their operant resources interact (Arnould, 2005). Then, the value in cultural contexts, social relationships and utopian worlds can be used in the life narratives when such a life project or role emerges in the future. Hence, consumer's life-world is a dynamic whole that balances between the culturally formed, but highly individual life history and the creation of the "future self" life projects (Garro, 2000).

## 7.1 Cultural value

The Louis Vuitton exhibitions acted as a cultural resource for the visitors, because of the schemas and knowledge they were able to develop through the experiences. Consumers have natural desire for knowledge because it helps to interpret the lived experiences and events and categorize them into understandable contexts in life (Abbe et al., 2009). This desire drove the visitors to visit SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez and interpret the symbolic resources the exhibitions entailed. By consuming the symbolic resources visitors also reconstructed their personal life projects and roles but also their cultural operant resources and life-worlds with the new knowledge. Therefore, while looking for understanding in life, visitors became producers of culture as they negotiated and reconfigured the cultural meanings prevailing in the marketplace (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Peñaloza, 2001). Most evident cultures that people narrated on was the ones of luxury, fashion and art but the discussion shaped also the fundamental questions on family values and personal independence. Therefore, Louis Vuitton became a symbolic resource of these cultures in the narratives of the consumers.

Knowledge as complex networks of meanings is shared from generation to other to maintain the consensus within the society (Ridley et al., 1994) and thus it appeared to be central cultural resource for value creation for the visitors in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions. In a way, visitors lend their cultural knowledge to the exhibitions by using their own cultural background and Louis Vuitton's value propositions as resources for life project production. Through the negotiation of meanings, the knowledge spread to the other consumers (Peñaloza, 2001). The shared knowledge and cultural consensus was found as fundamental value for the visitors, because it tied individuals to different subcultures (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Through combining, reworking and innovating symbolic resources in the Louis Vuitton exhibitions, visitors could create social identities of Louis Vuitton communities, visitors' own families, luxury, art and fashion, as well as French and Asian heritages.

The most efficient way of achieving cultural consensus is to express the meanings through existing cultural meanings (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Through the cultural resources of the visitors, Louis Vuitton's value proposition took a form in variety of metaphors, out of which "rags to riches" and "rebirth" were the most notable ones. These metaphors are

symbolic resources of the Western ideologies, evoking meanings in freedom, individualism, success and continuity of the life. In a form of a story, these complex ideologies of the Western culture are easier to understand (IJzerman and Koole, 2011; Peñaloza, 2001). In the Louis Vuitton exhibitions, by consuming these ideologies visitors aimed at justifying own position within the culture, for example by reflecting personal resources on the ideals of success. This is similar to way Mountain Dew used the metaphors of anarchism to solve the tensions of the American manhood (Holt, 2003). The exhibitions offered visitors a space where consumers interact and negotiate on the metaphor meanings. The value of the achieved cultural consensus is realized, when the postmodern anxieties related to e.g. individualism and continuity of life are balanced in the life projects of a consumer.

The importance of cultural consensus is emphasized when consumers want to create representations of the self i.e. narrate their life roles and projects (Arnould and Price, 2000; Kozinets, 2001). For example, for Laura, who was starting her career as an actress, the exhibition was consumed to create her life project as a creative professional. By using representations of creativity in her life narrative, Laura aimed at sharing her life projects and roles with those who were already similarly culturally sensitive (Ridley et al., 1994). In other words, gaining knowledge and developing one's schemas is a requirement for authoritative performances as consumers join to desired subcultures by using symbolic meanings that are considered as valuable for its members (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Thus, creating one's life project is balancing between different cultural meanings within different subcultures and this is what brings cultural value to the consumer.

## 7.2 Social value

SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez provided also social value for the visitors, making them a social resource for conducting authoritative performances (Arnould and Price, 2000). Interpersonal attachments and feeling of belonging are basic necessities for individual's well-being and health (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). However, based on the postmodern thought, culture isolates individuals from the society and these tensions are balanced through interpersonal consumption practices (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Therefore, consumers participate in collective experiences where they can interact with other consumers sharing common lifestyle interests (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

For many, SERIES3 and Volez, Vouez, Voyagez were platforms for interacting consciously or subconsciously with family members, friends and other consumers. By using their social operant resources, such as existing family relationships, visitors sought for social value which influenced their cognitive processes, emotional responses and consumption behavior (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Collective experiences foster justification of social belongingness through exploitation of shared beliefs, meanings, status systems, cultural knowledge and rituals (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In the Louis Vuitton exhibitions, one way of creating social value was by carrying out rituals that strengthened the social ties with other individuals. This was emphasized especially when the close family member or friend who was not present which evoked emotions of longing and desire to acquire back the missing social tie (Belk et al., 2003). This desire to connect with an unattainable person was balanced through the deployment of rituals that replicated the prior experiences with this person. Social media was used as a mean to fulfil the negotiation of meanings within the ritual. This way, social value of the exhibitions emerge when the tensions, that are caused by the longing for others (Tumbat and Belk, 2011), can be momentarily released.

Experiences also enforce and develop subcultures that are based on the meanings of origin, such as family and ethnic society (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). As a complex cultural context to understand, personal origin can also be embodied through consumption, which in this case was done either by consuming Louis Vuitton products or consuming the exhibitions as interpersonal experiences. This way, visitors tied linking (social) value to Louis Vuitton and posited it as symbolic resource to embody specific subculture (Cova, 1997). For example, for Carol, Louis Vuitton was a cornerstone of their family history and symbolized heritage and life continuity. On the other hand, the French origin and values of Alix were also incorporated in the spirit of Louis Vuitton. By consuming Louis Vuitton and the two exhibitions, visitors could consume their own origin that otherwise is abstract and ambiguous concept to understand and this way identify with the subcultures sharing the same roots.

In SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, visitors also negotiated on the existence of several consumer communities and tribes, such as fashion “insiders” and Louis Vuitton employees. In contradiction to family circle or nationality, these subcultures are formed for example, around the shared interests towards specific brand or lifestyle (Arnould and

Thompson, 2005; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Although the value of participating or alternatively, resigning from different consumer communities is fundamentally social, the motive of their existence is more or less communal agency and information sharing (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Thus, the social value in observing these subcultures were the schemas that can be exploited when such life project or role emerges (Kleine et al., 2000).

As outlined, cultural knowledge of different subcultures, for example of Louis Vuitton customers, is valuable for its members in the creation of their social identities. The responsibility of the members is to maintain the community, cultural consensus within it and rework the valued meanings through implementation of practices that foster members' social identity. In many ways, SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez represented these authoritative performances with different ideologies, social practices, values and rituals (Arnould and Price, 2000). Therefore, exhibitions like them offer ideal environments for consumers for seeking communal affiliation that again, is vital for constructing one's life projects.

### 7.3 Utopian value

The both Louis Vuitton exhibitions were described in the narratives of the visitors with terms of newness and experiencing the unexpected. Therefore, they fell within extraordinary experiences that create communion around multisensory stimuli, emotional arousal and fantasy aspects (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). These kind of environments activate visitors' physical operant resources and imagination that make them utopian resources for the consumers' life project construction, spawning utopian value. Utopian value is thus socially and historically constructed notions of place and space that build the imaginary, ideal life free of current limitations of human existence (Maclaran and Brown, 2005, 2001). The findings indicate that, consuming utopia can be considered as both authenticating acts that bring the consumer closer to the "true" self and authoritative performances that foster culturally formed dreams and ideals of the perfect reality (Arnould and Price, 2000).

In SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez, visitors built utopian past with feelings of nostalgia that with they constructed their social identities. Especially in Volez, Voguez, Voyagez visitors experienced feelings of nostalgia and longing for the better past (Goulding, 1999). In the exhibition settings, visitors tend to romanticize history and this way create

utopian worlds of the past. The utopian value per se is the imagined communities of “caring and sharing” that in the postmodern world brings comfort to the times of threat (Brown et al., 2003; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Indeed, the exhibitions evoked communal nostalgia through Louis Vuitton’s heritage and notable events or changes in world order in the recent history, such as technological innovations and *la belle époque*. Some visitors were able to create personal utopian pasts through Louis Vuitton. For example, Carol and her mother materialized their memory into Louis Vuitton products (Belk, 1988) that today, evoke a powerful sense of the utopian past and links generations together.

Visitors built also utopian futures tied to e.g. metaphoric references of science fiction and to future-oriented consumption. The utopian world of the future was formed of the spatial and temporal notions of liminality, of being nowhere (Maclaran and Brown, 2005). The both exhibitions provided such intense physical and emotional stimuli, that it displaced visitors from their ordinary lives and life roles. These new places were certain kind of new universes or fantasy worlds where different music, temperature, lights, textures and visual illusions of a space without gravity awoke visitors to question their everyday surroundings and roles. Also, the exhibitions intrigued visitors as they were encouraged to practice imaginative role-playing using their schemas as a guidance (Arnould, 2005; Kleine et al., 2000). For example, the utopian value comprised in the distance that was created between the experience and commercialism through role-play (Kozinets, 2001; Maclaran and Brown, 2005). By feeling free of personal resources, mainly of money and time, visitors could play with the idea of living in a utopian world where these doesn’t restrict their freedom or value for the society.

Therefore, such extraordinary experiences like SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez deliver utopian value by spatializing and materializing self-transformation (Maclaran and Brown, 2005). In other words, these kind of exhibitions are spaces where consumers can enhance their consumer spirituality in ways of finding purpose for life, relationships and creativity (Davies and Freathy, 2014), spaces where they can carry out authenticating acts and authoritative performances with its symbolic resources and ideologies. Utopian worlds of consumers are constituted through these practices of self-expression and life project narrations. The utopian value is realized when consumers strive towards their dreams lives and personas that for marketplaces like the two Louis Vuitton exhibitions offer an ideal staging.

## 7.4 Summary

As outlined, the Louis Vuitton exhibitions represented temporal and spatial marketplaces where visitors can live through cultural, interpersonal and extraordinary experiences. What makes exhibitions particularly special is that they are venues for social interaction and authenticating acts, in which the multisensory stimuli, emotional arousal and fantasy aspects create cultural, social and utopian value to the consumer (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Through careful deployment of operand and operant resources, consumers also create value to brands as they are invited to the consumer life projects through consumption practices which evolves their value propositions further (Arnould et al., 2006). At the same time, consumers act as cultural producers when they shape the ideologies, lifestyle norms and marketplace sensibilities of the dominant cultures (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Maclaran and Brown, 2001). Thus, consumption of experiences indicates what world we live in and what are the current fundamental values of consumers.

As a conclusion, in versatile, multifaceted exhibitions like the two of Louis Vuitton, consumers, brands and cultural phenomena blend into one social universe. Arnould et al. (2006) claim that the fundamental goal of consumers is to create their life projects and roles through consumption. To complete their basic idea, I suggest that consumers participate in co-creation activities to create their life projects and roles that with they can tie themselves to different subcultures and social units. While doing so, visitors are also in a constant search for their “true” selves that are revealed through highly intense experiences. Whether it is about consuming culture, interpersonal relations or creating the “true” self, the goal for these practices is to express the self *as part of something*. In the postmodern world, consumption of cultures, experiences, products or fantasies is a mean to accomplish value for life and thus, the feeling of belongingness.

## 8. Conclusions

The objective of this thesis was to examine how consumers create value in the branded exhibitions through the deployment of their operand and operant resources. The findings demonstrate that exhibitions provide a cultural and social environment where consumers interact with brands and other consumers to construct their life projects and roles that through the value is created (Arnould et al., 2006). This is an interaction of different symbolic resources that produces cultural, social and utopian value through the activities of value co-creation in which consumers consume different cultural contexts, social relationships, freedom and utopia. All of this happens through the lens of the unique life-worlds of consumers where the symbolic meanings circulate and develop once new experiences come across.

### 8.1 Managerial implications

This thesis provides valuable insight for marketing of brands and especially for curating branded exhibitions and brandscapes, that is widely used tool for engaging consumers (Verhoef et al., 2009). First of all, marketers need to acknowledge that consumers actively co-create the value mainly by implementing their physical, social and cultural resources that act on firm-provided operand resources and their own possessions (Arnould, 2005; Arnould et al., 2006; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Therefore, instead of focusing on what consumers own, marketers must look deeper to what resources consumers emphasize when they interpret, consume and reproduce brand's value propositions. For example, the findings indicate that many consumers experienced Louis Vuitton through other people even though they did not attend the exhibitions personally. In this case, consumers actively deployed their social resources to create value. For other brands, cultural or physical resources might play more central role in the value co-creation. This guides marketers to design such experiences that facilitate and encourage consumers' deployment of such resources.

Also, it is important to acknowledge what value the possessions and consumption practices bring to the consumers' life roles and projects. The findings demonstrate that it is often social value that guides consumers' construction of the self but it can be achieved also through



cultural and utopian aspects. This shows not only why people consume the brand but also if the value proposition is received in the marketplace as intended. The value is also a way to differentiate the brand from others. In the case of SERIES3, Louis Vuitton was contrasted against other luxury brands and the repeating notion was that it stood out with its utopian value. This finding highlights the importance of understanding how the value is perceived by the consumers and how it might be created also through other brands' value propositions. This way, brands can be located into wider social and cultural frameworks and be coded as symbolic resources of different marketplace cultures that consumers then use when constructing their life projects and roles.

To be socially and culturally aware of consumers' life-worlds, marketers must dig into dominant lifestyle trends and ideologies to start with. What is in right now and what phenomena is discussed on indicates what are the concurrent values in the marketplace. This research suggests paying attention to consumers' narratives to reveal these values, instead of focusing on features of best-selling products. The stories that circulate within marketplace are the ones that develop the value propositions of the brand to resonate with the current ideals and dream realities. In addition, with hedonic products and experiences, marketers should focus on the communal utopian worlds that consumers narrate on. The luxury brands should aim at coding and representing themselves as realization of those utopian futures and dream selves. As an example, listening how consumers discuss on their own lifestyle, brands can discover roles that can be completed with certain ideologies and symbolic resources. This makes it possible to understand, what are the needs of the consumers within this lifestyle subculture and how the brand can meet these needs.

This research shows that branded exhibitions are an excellent way of creating value once they provide consumers a space where narration, dreaming and social interaction overlap. When curating the exhibitions, marketers have to think through the value propositions that the design of the space represents, using the social and cultural framework of the target consumers as a guidance. To communicate specific cultural values, norms or symbols, cultural ideologies can also be embedded in the physical elements and consumption practices of the space (Peñaloza, 2001). For example, simply having physical elements where the visitors can encounter other people creates social value. On the other hand, to create extraordinary experiences that are obligated to the utopian worlds, the key is to provide something new, something unexpected, that ties consumers into new subcultures but also

helps them to find their “true” selves. A successful brand can position itself in the center of consumers’ authenticating acts and authoritative performances, where all the social interactions and search for the self are based on consuming the symbolic resources the brand owns.

## 8.2 Limitations of the study

This research provides many insights into consumer experiences, co-creation of value and the construction of consumers’ life projects and roles. However, being qualitative in nature it sets some limitations on the generalization of the findings. Because the aim of this research is to give thick description of the consumer experience in the two Louis Vuitton exhibitions, it does not produce generalizations outside this context (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). In other words, with the findings one is able to discuss on the value co-creation process in SERIES3 and Volez, Voguez, Voyagez but these patterns and meanings cannot be transferred to other environments. Also, this research provides *an* understanding of the consumer experiences not *the* understanding (Denzin, 1984). This means that one cannot use the findings of this research as a basis for predicting experiences in the same context but instead, treat them as a flash of inspiration for further research.

In addition, it should be noted that this research is highly influenced by my personal background that is shaped e.g. by Western and Finnish cultural contexts. Therefore, all of the findings are interpreted through this lens and it might limit the overall conclusions made in this thesis. Also, my pre-understanding on the branded experiences and the value in them might have shaped my findings and similarly, rule out some new implications that would have been valuable for the research.

The interviews were conducted in English that was neither my nor most of the interviewees’ native language that restricts the credibility of the narrative method. The use of foreign language emphasized the problematic attempts to reveal the lived experiences of consumers as it is. There were 42 interviews in total out of which a few were left out of the analysis because of unclarity in language or recording. Moreover, I have to trust that the interviewees told the experience as lived, not leaving out negative elements of the event (Norton, 1996; Takach, 2013). Also, during the transcription of the interview recordings, some additional expletives were eliminated to maintain clarity in the quotes. It should also be acknowledged

that the decision to do the research only in two Louis Vuitton exhibitions, that naturally focus on the same brand, limit the credibility.

### 8.3 Suggestions for further research

This research has investigated the role of consumers' operand and operant resources in the process of value co-creation. It has also recognized three types of value that were created in the emplaced brandscapes of Louis Vuitton. This opens several opportunities for future research that touch upon consumer culture, value co-creation, resource-based view on consumers as well as practices of luxury marketing. Within the approach on identity construction through consumption and co-creation of value, one could explore each type of value further. For example, more research is needed to uncover the authenticating acts within utopian marketplace environments. Further, it would be interesting to investigate what value does consumer receive from dystopian brandscapes. Also, it is important to recognize if there are any other types of value that are created in the branded exhibitions.

There is still much to be done in the research on consumers' ways of deploying their operand and operant resources. This research focused mainly on consumers' social and cultural resources so it would be ideal to highlight the role of physical operant resources in the consumption situations. Also, one could investigate consumer experience in the context where consumers' operand resources are more central mediator of value. To apply the resource-based theory of the consumer and value co-creation into the luxury marketing, it would be interesting to see if there are any differences between exhibitions or events on mass-produced commodities and luxury products regarding consumers' use of their resources. This perspective would complement current research and further raise interest towards the forming of consumer experiences in branded exhibition contexts.

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## 10. Appendices

### 10.1 Interviewees

SERIES3			
NAME	GENDER	AGE	NATIONALITY
Jan	Female	50-55	Australia
Anita	Female	35-40	UK
Kasia	Female	25-30	Poland
Natalie	Female	30-35	Ireland
Janina	Female	20-25	Germany
Marlene	Female	50-55	Germany
Marta	Female	30-35	Spain
Jonathan	Male	20-25	Taiwan
Rebecca	Female	50-55	UK
Jetícia	Female	40-45	Brazil
Maria	Female	20-30	Greece/Germany
Jamie	Female	15-20	UK
Rieya	Female	15-20	UK
Laura	Female	20-25	Peru
Chiara	Female	30-35	Italia
Harveen	Female	15-20	UK/India
Gurleen	Female	15-20	UK/India
Ana	Female	35-40	Portugal

Carola	Female	25-30	Austria
Carola's mom	Female	50-55	Austria
Sephie	Female	30-35	France

## VOLEZ, VOGUEZ, VOYAGEZ

NAME	GENDER	AGE	NATIONALITY
Mizio	Male	40-45	Japan
Beatrice	Female	55-60	France
Bermin	Male	50-55	Taiwan
Clementine	Female	20-25	France
Marie-Beatrix	Female	20-25	France
Marie	Female	20-25	France
Guillaume	Male	30-35	France
Shelton	Male	20-25	Canada
Alexandre	Female	25-30	France
Nolwenn	Female	20-25	France
Noelia	Female	30-35	Spain
Elizabeth	Female	20-25	US
Alix	Female	20-25	France
Chloé	Female	20-25	France
Damien	Male	35-40	France
Virginia	Female	20-25	US
La	Female	20-25	Vietnam

Pham	Female	20-25	Vietnam
Clair	Female	20-25	France
Tove	Female	30-35	Sweden
Caroline	Female	15-20	France
Pierre	Male	65-70	France
Pierre's wife	Female	65-70	France
Johann	Female	25-30	France
John	Male	25-30	France



## 10.2 Pictures of SERIES3



*1: Somerset House*



*2: Introduction of the new Louis Vuitton logo*



3: "The genesis of a collection"



4: "Master mind"





5: "Artists' hands"



6: "The infinity catwalk"



7: *"The science of savoir faire"*



8: *Old luggages in glass boxes*



9: Statues of Marte Mei van Haaster presenting new collection



10: "The walk in wardrobe"



### 10.3 Pictures of Volez, Voguez, Voyagez



*11: The classic trunk of Louis Vuitton*



*12: The second room*



13: Old advertisements



14: Old trunks





*15: Big sail*



*16: Desert*





*17: On road*



*18: The room presenting products in aviation*



19: Train room



20: Pieces designed by Marc Jacobs





21: Trunks with butterfly graphics by Damien Hirst



22: Art with LV pattern



*23: Pieces made for celebrities*



*24: New collection*



25: Exclusive special items



26: Louis Vuitton luggage inspired by music